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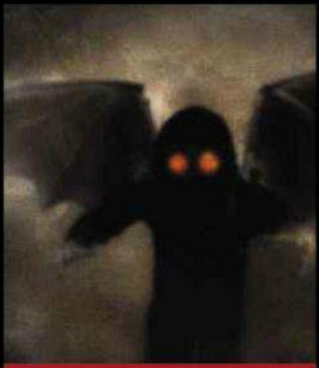

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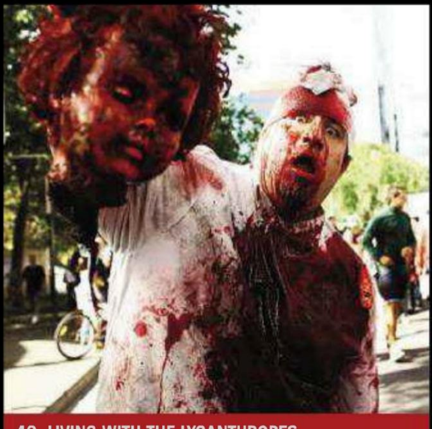

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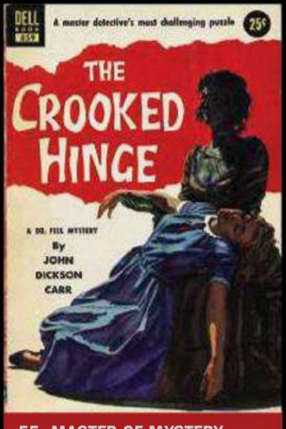

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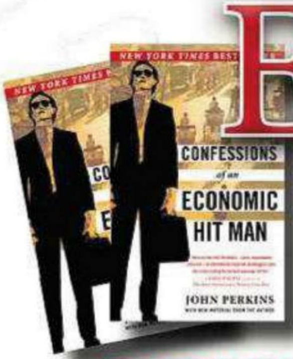
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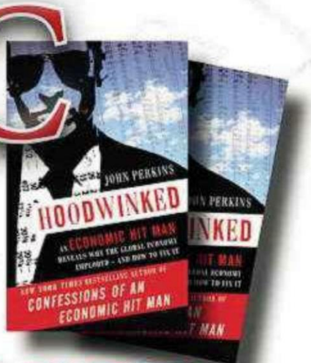
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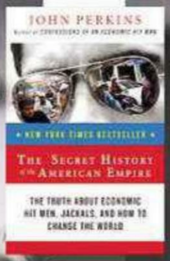
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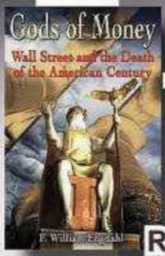
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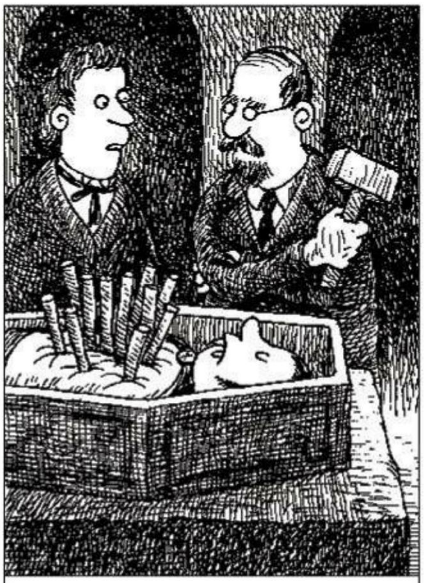
editorial

Children of the Night

Long live the chewing dead!

One hundred years ago, on 20 April 1912, the theatrical manager, journalist and writer Bram Stoker died at his house in London. None of the obituaries mentioned *Dracula*, and neither Stoker nor anyone else could have suspected that with the eponymous monster of his 1897 novel he had created a figure that would stalk confidently and compellingly right through the 20th century and still be found in rude (if undead) health in the 21st.

In this special issue, we celebrate the centenary of Stoker's passing, not by looking squarely at his most famous creation – see Gail-Nina Anderson's excellent survey (**FT257:34–41**) for that – but by examining both the historical forerunners of Stoker's undying Count and his bizarre afterlife as part of a popular culture in which fact and fiction have become increasingly blurred.


"Are you done?"

MARTIN ROSS

Dr Leo Ruickbie takes us back to the 1730s, a decade in which accounts of the "chewing dead" from Eastern Europe came to the attention of philosophers, doctors and theologians. In the early part of the decade, according to no less a figure than Voltaire, "nothing was spoken of but vampires", and Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote to the Archbishop of Paris about the medical and legal proofs of their existence (pp44–48). Ironically, it was perhaps this very collision between ancient, unenlightened superstition and the enquiring, analytical procedures of the emerging Age of Reason that helped provide a 'factual' basis for the newly described vampire lore – a lore that would now evolve along quite different lines, conditioned as much by the influences of literary and cinematic fiction as scientific or folkloric 'fact'.

These tales out of Eastern Europe were, of course, an influence on Stoker's novel, but the traffic was, in the end, two-way. Ghost-hunter John Fraser tells the little-known story of how two men from the Romanian Ministry of Tourism, bewildered by tales of English and American visitors searching for 'Dracula's Castle' and other fictional sites, created a surreal local tourist industry involving factitious attractions based on the ever-evolving lore that Stoker had created and Hollywood disseminated far and wide (pp50–53).

Another bewilderingly post-modern cultural artefact (and our cover star this month) is the 'vampire-killing kit', a pseudo-antique that can fetch thousands of pounds at auction. Jonathan Ferguson, curator of firearms at the Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds, casts his expert eye over these curious cases and asks whether we should view them as historical objects, clever hoaxes or something harder to categorise and occupying a liminal space somewhere in between.

Finally, our intrepid reporter George Binning summons the spectral figure of Dr Gregory L Reece (via the modern scrying glass of Skype) for a chat about the lifestyle choices that make otherwise perfectly 'normal' folk identify themselves as vampires, Satanists and even werewolves (pp40–42).

Bram Stoker, we're sure, would have been very surprised indeed by all these developments.

Errata

FT286:34 In Matt Salusbury's feature "A Short History of Dog-headed Men", the map that has dog-headed men in a side panel appeared in Hartmann Schledel's *Nuremberg Chronicle* of 1493, not "The Westmuller World Map of 1492", which doesn't exist. It is a garbled version of the Martin Waldseemüller world map of 1507, the first to name "America". The error originated in one of Matt's sources.

FT287:10 "Holey Moley!" [**FT287:10**] states that Stafani Ingamells, as well as having been diagnosed with trypophobia, a fear of holes, is 199. This would be a bit of a stretch, even for *FT*. She is, in fact, 19. Thanks to Paul Jackson, Richard Alexander, Synchronous (via the FTMB) and comicbookgirl and Jennifer Hynes (both via Twitter) for spotting this one.

DAVID SUTTON

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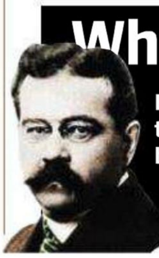
Why fortean?



Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

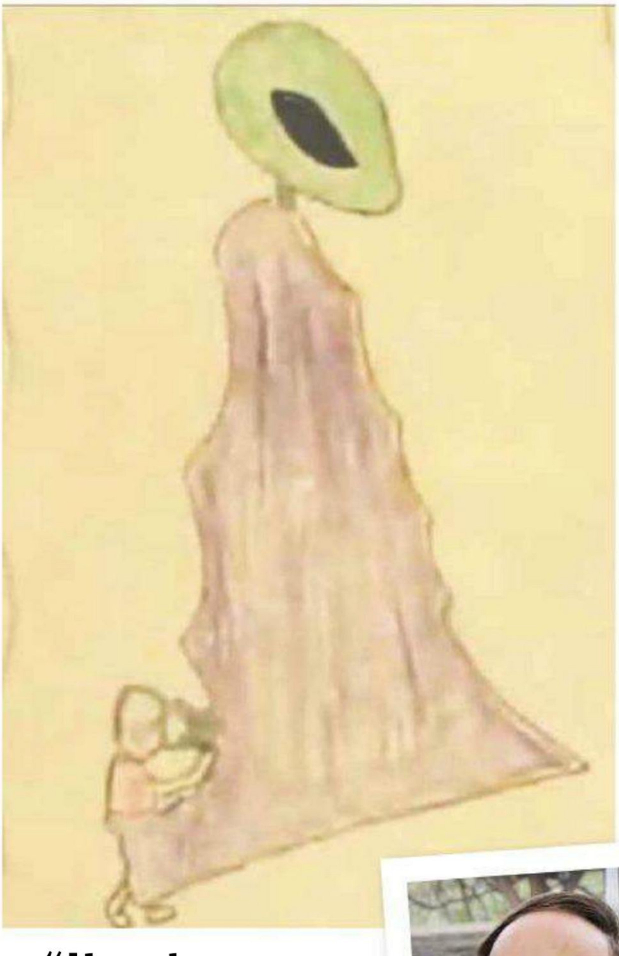
“My mother is an alien”

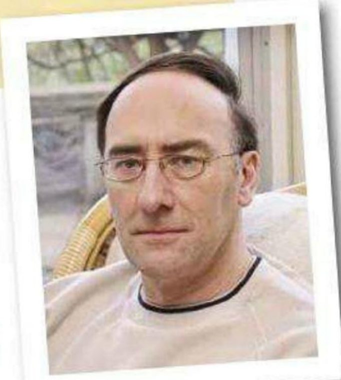
Whitby town councillor claims to have had alien encounters since he was a baby lying in his cot

A Labour politician has stunned his town council colleagues by claiming his “real mother” is a green alien. Councillor Simon Parkes, who was elected in February to represent Stakesby ward on Whitby Town Council, said although he has had hundreds of close encounters with extraterrestrials, it would not interfere with his resolve to help residents at the seaside resort. Interviewed by Joanne Summerscales for AMMACH (Anomalous Mind Management Abductee Contact Helpline) – see http://bit.ly/GVON6W (YouTube) – Councillor Parkes said he can recall seeing a kite-shaped face when he was still in the womb.

His first direct alien encounter happened when he was six to eight months old, when a strange figure appeared over his cot. “Two green stick things came in,” he said. “I was aware of some movement over my head. I thought, ‘They’re not mummy’s hands, mummy’s hands are pink’. He was then picked up by the creature, which was 9ft (2.7m) tall, wearing a purple cloak, and had huge eyes, two holes for a nose, a thin mouth, and four fingers on each hand. “I was looking straight into its face,” he said. “It enters my mind through my eyes and it sends a message down my optic nerve into my brain. It says, ‘I’m your real mother, I’m your more important mother’.” He said after he contracted chicken pox at the age of three, his mother went to work and left him at home to fend for himself when an 8ft (2.4m) “doctor” dressed as a waiter arrived to offer help and armed “human enforcement” officers appeared through his wardrobe. He goes on to describe “shadow-beings” and other creatures taking the form of cats, owls, circus clowns and policemen.

As an 11-year-old, he was taken on a craft by his alien “mother” and made a deal with the beings on board to gain knowledge about the past and the future. He was given an insight into the origins of the human race, which was genetically altered by an advanced alien civilisation to “dumb down” the species. “I’m only telling you what I’ve seen,” he said. “They could be lying to me. The reason extraterrestrials are interested in me is not because of my physical body, but because of what is inside me. My soul. These reptiles are guilty as hell. They have apologised several times to me. They have said they are sorry for what they have done to your people.”





LEFT: Councillor Simon Parkes’s sketch of the alien visitor. **BELOW** Simon Parkes.

ROSS-PARRY.CO.UK

“It enters my mind through my eyes and into my brain”

Only the previous week (12–18 March), Parkes told a reporter, a mysterious black car rammed into his on the A64, while he was returning from a meeting with other believers. “It was a horrendous crash,” he said. “The black car just zoomed up and rammed me, it went straight into the side of my car. The driver walked straight up to me, holding Coca-Cola, and said, ‘I’m sorry, I had to do that’. I’m lucky to be alive.” A North Yorkshire spokesperson confirmed that a four-vehicle pile-up had occurred on the A64 near Tadcaster, saying it was caused when a car braked suddenly and that minor injuries were sustained.

Parkes told a reporter that his extraterrestrial beliefs “did not come up on the doorstep” while he was campaigning recently. “For many people who don’t experience it, it’s very hard to accept,” he said. “We are taught to only see and believe what we can touch, but it’s acceptable to believe in religion. It’s a personal matter and it doesn’t affect my work. I’m more interested in fixing someone’s leaking roof or potholes. People don’t want me to talk about aliens. I get more common sense out of the aliens than out of Scarborough Town Hall. The aliens are far more aware of stuff. People in the Town Hall seem not to be aware of the needs of Whitby.” Fellow Stakesby ward member and former Mayor of Whitby, Councillor Terry Jennison, said the matter had not been discussed by councillors, commenting: “I am completely in the dark about this.” *Scarborough Eve. News, 23 Mar; Northern Echo, 26 Mar 2012.*

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This year's crop of April Fool prank news stories
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Family baffled by new text messages from the Beyond
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ASSAULT ON ASSANGE
The campaign against the founder of Wikileaks
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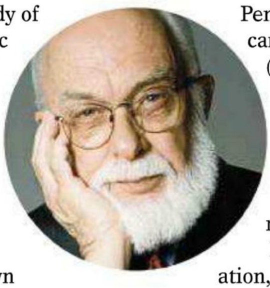
Will the real "Carlos" please stand up?

"The Amazing" Randi has a new "Million Dollar Challenge" – bailing his partner out of jail

The long-term partner and one-time assistant of arch-debunker and scourge of the 'paranormal' James Randi (far right) appeared in court in Florida on 14 March, where he pleaded guilty to a charge of passport fraud. Deyvi Pena, 50 (below), who arrived in the US from Venezuela under a student visa in 1984, has spent the past 25 years as "Jose Luis Alvarez", and under that name had made a reputation for himself in South Florida as a painter. In a 2011 lecture he gave at the University of California, Berkeley, Alvarez promised to "guide us through his own personal journey of investigation into the realms of consciousness, mysticism, spirituality, magic, shamanism, space exploration, and paranormal phenomena. Utilising the concept in theoretical astrophysics of parallel universes and space as a continuum membrane with no beginning or end, [he] will place his cast of characters as a stand-in for the strong human desire for knowledge and transformation and his continued visual inquiry into the realms of the fantastic and the philosophical."

If this sounds more like a parody of New Age clap-trap than an artistic statement, then perhaps Alvarez/Pena's past provides some clues. In 1986, he was hired by "The Amazing" Randi as an assistant, and has lived and worked with the one-time stage magician, CSICOP and James Randi Educational Foundation (JREF) founder ever since. His best-known work with Randi was the famous 'Carlos' hoax of 1988, in which 'Alvarez' posed as a New Age healer channelling a discarnate entity known as 'Carlos'. 'Carlos' garnered much press and TV coverage before the whole thing was revealed as a hoax created by Randi with the aim of demonstrating how easily people are duped by claims of the paranormal. There are still disagreements about whether the media (one of Randi's chief targets) were really taken in, but the case is often cited as a classic 'Skeptical' set piece (see Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*, Ch 13, for a typically laudatory account).



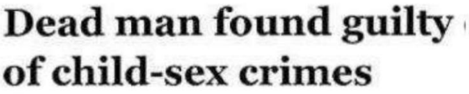
Pena/Alvarez's dual identity only came to light when the real Alvarez (a teacher's aide from New York) tried to take out a passport in 2010 and the federal authorities realised that someone else had done so – using Alvarez's name, date of birth and social security number – in 1987.

Police arrested Pena at the Plantation, Florida, home he shares with Randi in September 2011. He was released on a personal surety bond of $1 million in October.

One question is how much Randi, who has so far remained silent, knew about his partner's dual identity. Could this fearless exposer of fraud and champion of 'critical thinking' have been fooled for so long? A 1986 *Toronto Star* story on Randi mentions his assistant being one "David [sic] Pena, a young man of about 20". This would suggest that Randi must have been aware that Pena had changed his name to Alvarez by 1988, the time of the 'Carlos' hoax. And it appears that, to meet Pena's bail conditions, Randi swore under oath that he had seen Pena's Venezuelan passport years ago. Pena's sentencing is set for 17 May 2012. *Sun Sentinel (Florida), 9 Sept; 18 Oct; 21 Oct 2011; 14 Mar 2012.*

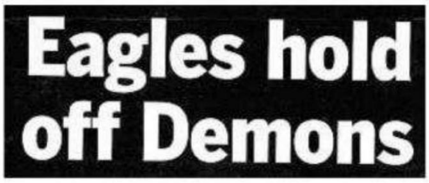
EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



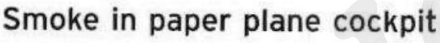
Dead man found guilty of child-sex crimes

Phnom Penh Post (Cambodia), 11 Oct 2011.



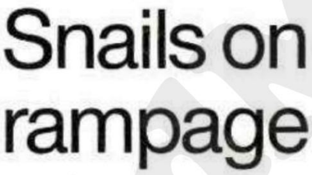
Eagles hold off Demons

The Telegraph ("Middle Georgia's newspaper"), 1 Oct 2011.



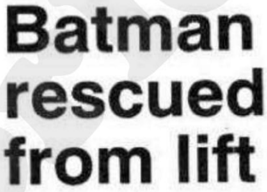
Smoke in paper plane cockpit

Guernsey Press, 3 Oct 2011.



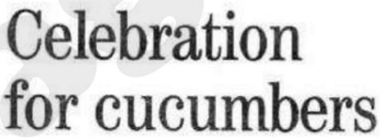
Snails on rampage

Sun, 5 Oct 2011.



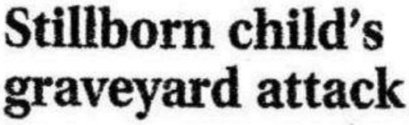
Batman rescued from lift

Wolverhampton Express & Star, 26 Sept 2011.



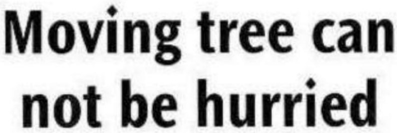
Celebration for cucumbers

Cheshunt & Waltham Mercury, 15 Sept 2011.



Stillborn child's graveyard attack

Nottingham Post, 7 Oct 2011.



Moving tree can not be hurried

Staines Informer, 15 Sept 2011.

WorldMags.net

APRIL FOOL ROUND-UP

More tall tales from the book of almost-but-not-quite believable announcements

UNICORN COOKBOOK

On 1 April, there was a press release headed "Unicorn cookbook found at the British Library". We were told: "A long-lost mediæval cookbook, containing recipes for hedgehogs, blackbirds and even unicorns, has been discovered at the British Library. Professor Brian Trump of the British Mediæval Cookbook Project described the find as near-miraculous. 'We've been hunting for this book for years. The moment I first set my eyes on it was spine-tingling.'

"Experts believe that the cookbook was compiled by Geoffrey Fule, who worked in the kitchens of Philippa of Hainault, Queen of England (1328–1369). Geoffrey had a reputation for blending unusual flavours – one scholar has called him 'the Heston Blumenthal of his day' – and everything points to his hand being behind the compilation. After recipes for herring, tripe and codswallop (fish stew, a popular dish in the Middle Ages) comes that beginning 'Taketh one unicorne'. The recipe calls for the beast to be marinaded in cloves and garlic, and then roasted on a griddle. The cookbook's compiler, doubtless Geoffrey Fule himself, added pictures in its margins, depicting the unicorn being prepared and then served."

SABRE-TOOTHED LEMMING

Meanwhile, *Science Now* gave us "Ice Age ankle biters" by Sid Perkins: "A serendipitous hike along a remote Norwegian fjord has yielded innumerable fossils of one of the most unusual creatures to have died out at the end of the last Ice Age: the sabre-toothed lemming. Palæontologists have dubbed the species *Lemmus scimitardontii*, naming the tiny, enigmatic mammal for its most prominent feature: the sharp, stout fangs that measure about twice the length of its skull. The creatures' remains – a bone-studded, furry mat that if fully excavated would probably cover an area equal to three soccer fields – are entombed in a 20-centimetre-thick layer of fine-grained sediment about 30 metres high on the south face of the fjord, says D. Avril Poisson, a vertebrate palæontologist at the High-Arctic Institute of the Museum of Montreal (HI-MOM) [etc]". http://bit.ly/Hzt21C (*news.sciencemag.org*) *1 April 2012.*

Plunge into the molten lava core of an active volcano!

VOLCANIC EXPLORATION

Also on 1 April, the Virgin company announced "a revolutionary new vehicle, VVS1, which will be capable of plunging three people into the molten lava core of an active volcano." Sir Richard Branson was quoted as saying: "Alongside our adventures with Virgin Galactic and Virgin Oceanic, volcanoes are the next great unexplored terrain. What can I say, I lava challenge!" In its first three years of operation, we are told, Virgin Volcanic's VVS1 will descend into the five most active volcanoes in the world: Etna in Sicily, Stromboli in the Aeolian Islands, Yasur and Ambrym in Vanuatu, and Tinakula in the Solomon Islands.

The press announcement goes on to say: "In future this technology can be developed as a clean, safe and fast alternative to transcontinental commercial aviation. By taking the heat from molten lava Virgin Volcanic plans to develop a totally renewable energy source to power the VVS1. It is seen as a way to literally fulfil Richard Branson's philosophy of screwing business as usual. This would involve going through the Earth rather than round it. Experts predict that one could travel from Hawaii to Naples in a couple of hours via the molten lava flows, with passengers boarding and disembarking from a network of 'Earthports' close to the world's volcanoes."

ZOMBIE GUN

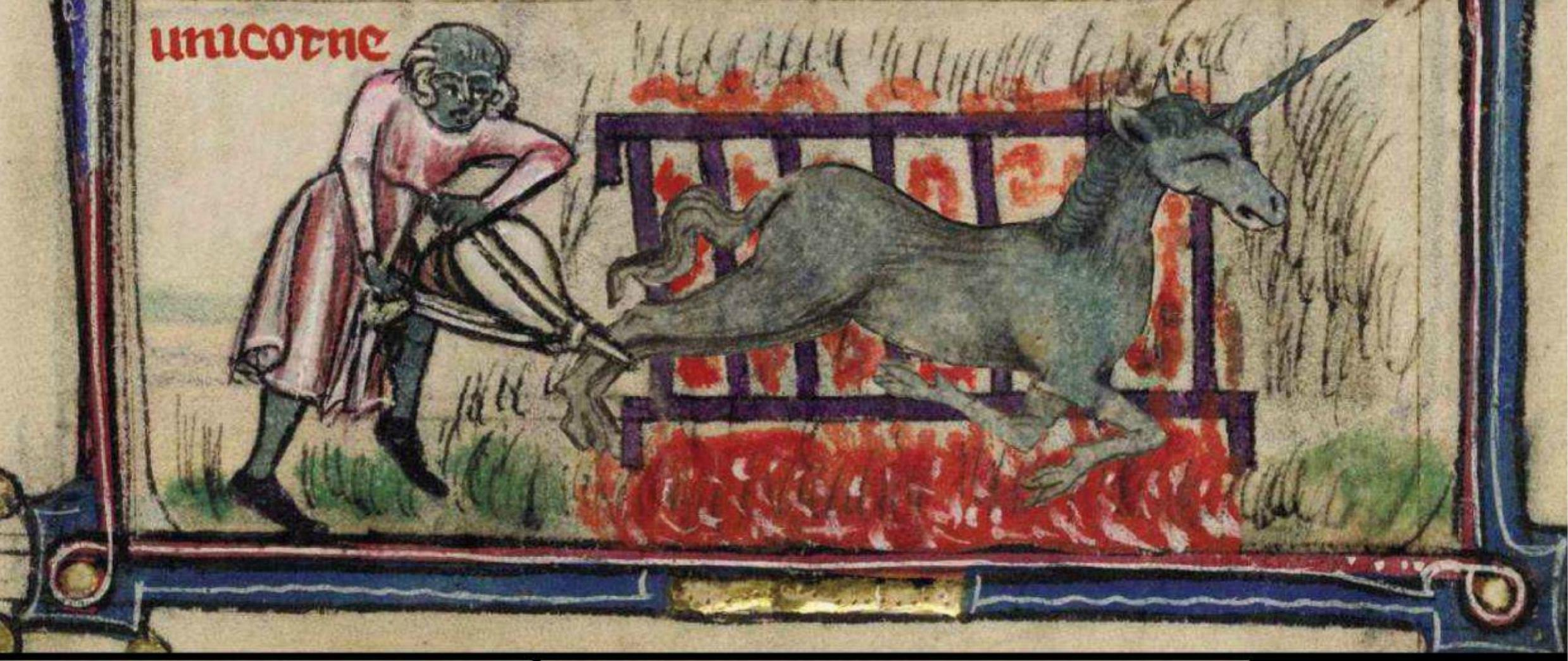
Another news story on April Fools' Day looked like a send-up, but turned out to be true – probably.

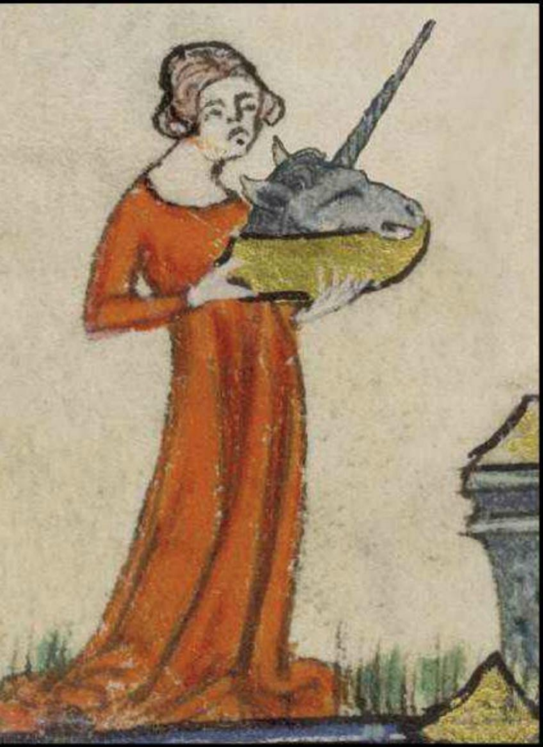
'Psychotronic' guns that can effectively turn people into zombies have been given the go-ahead by Russian president Vladimir Putin. The weapons attack the central nervous system with electromagnetic radiation like that found in microwave ovens. "Such high-tech weapons systems will be comparable in effect to nuclear weapons," said Putin, "but will be more acceptable in terms of political and military ideology." Precise details of the Russian gun have not been revealed. However, previous research has shown that low-frequency waves or beams can affect brain cells, alter psychological states and make it possible to transmit suggestions and commands directly into someone's thought processes. High doses of microwaves can damage the functioning of internal organs, control behaviour or even drive victims to suicide.

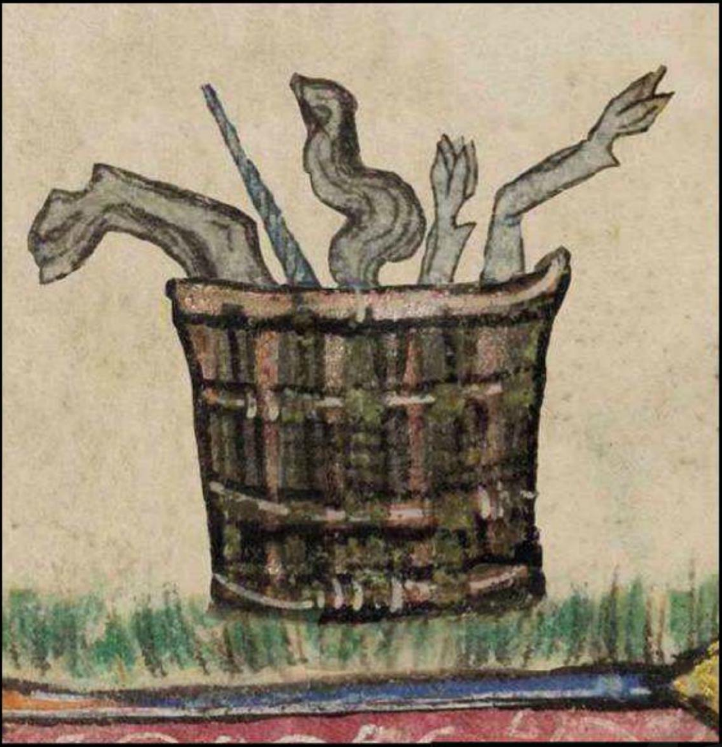
"This is a highly serious weapon," said Anatoly Tsyganok, head of the Military Forecasting Centre in Moscow. "When it was used for dispersing a crowd and it was focused on a man, his body temperature went up immediately as if he was thrown into a hot frying pan. Still, we know very little about this weapon and even special forces guys can hardly cope with it.'

The long-term effects are not known, but two years ago a former major in the Russian foreign intelligence agency, the GRU, died in Scotland after making claims about such a weapons programme to MI6. Sergei Serykh, 43, claimed he was a victim of weapons that he said were "many times more powerful than in the Matrix films". He died after falling from a Glasgow tower block with his wife and stepson in March 2010. While his death was assumed to be suicide, his family fear there was foul play. The Ministry of Defence declined to comment. *Mail on Sunday, 1 Apr 2012.*

ABOVE: Former Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, seen here showing off a Rasputnik VI 'mind-control' psychotronic gun.







ABOVE AND LEFT: Examples from Geoffrey Fule's supposed recipe for unicorn stew. The cookbook called for the beast to be marinaded in cloves and garlic and roasted on a griddle. **PHOTOS:** BRITISH LIBRARY

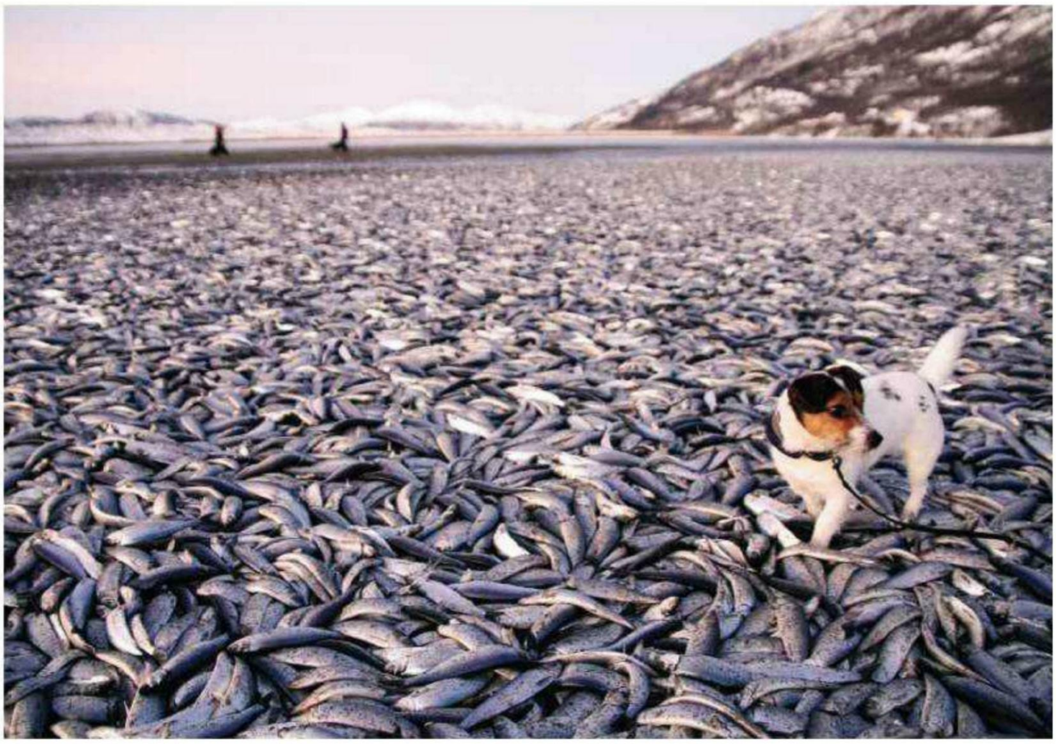
BELOW LEFT: The sabre-toothed lemming *Lemmus scimitardontii*, whose remains were found in Norway.

BELOW RIGHT: The design for Virgin Volcanic's drill vehicle, designed for high-speed transport between the world's leading volcanoes.

Virgin
VOLCANIC

Animals of ill-omen

Dead herring beached, plus a 'reincarnated' lawyer's fate



REUTERS/NTB SCANPIX

MARINE MASSACRE

More than 20 tons of herring washed up on a beach in northern Norway on New Year's Eve, prompting prophets of doom to claim it as another Sign of the End Times. Jan-Petter Jorgensen, 44, was walking with his dog Molly (above) when he found the stinking mass carpeting the beach at Kvaenes in the district of Nordreisa. "People say the same thing happened in the Eighties," he said. "Maybe the fish were caught in a deprived oxygen environment, and then died of fresh water." Other possible explanations were that the herring might have been driven ashore by predators or beached by a powerful storm. Jens Christian Holst of Norway's Institute of Marine Research said the phenomenon was probably caused by a combination of factors. While the local community pondered what to do with 20 tons of dead fish, nature intervened, and the heaps of herring vanished just as quickly as they had appeared. Holst said that coastal tidewaters had probably washed them back into the North Sea. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, The Sideshow, 4 Jan 2012.*

DOG DUCKS STONING

A Jewish rabbinical court condemned to death by stoning a stray dog it feared was the reincarnation of a lawyer who insulted its judges, according to the Israeli website Ynet. The dog entered the financial court in Jerusalem's ultra-Orthodox Mea Shearim neighbourhood "several weeks ago" (so probably sometime in May 2011) and wouldn't leave. The head of the court, Rabbi Avraham Dov Levin, was reminded of a curse passed on a now deceased secular lawyer about 20 years ago, when judges bid his spirit to enter the body of a dog. The animal is said to have escaped before the sentence could be carried out, but one of the judges reportedly asked local children to do it.

An Israeli animal rights group, Let the Animals Live, called on the court to overturn the sentence and filed a complaint with police against Rabbi Levin. PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) issued a statement: "By sentencing an innocent animal to a painful death for such an absurd reason, this rabbinical court has not only completely discredited itself but also violated *tza'ar ba'alei chayim* ("the suffering of living creatures") – one of the most important principles in Judaism." Rabbi Levin denied passing sentence on the dog, telling the *Maariv* newspaper: "There is no basis for abuse of animals from the side of Jewish Halacha [law]". However, a court manager told the daily *Yedioth Ahronoth* that the stoning had been ordered "as an appropriate way to 'get back at' the spirit which entered the poor dog". Dogs are considered impure in traditional Judaism. *Maariv (Israel), 16 June; Maan News Agency, 18 June; BBC News, 18+20 June 2011.*

SIDELINES...

GLOBAL SNORES

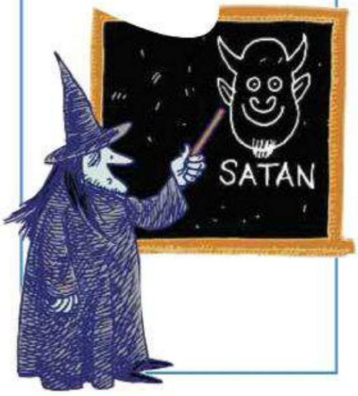
Residents of Kota Samarahan in Malaysia reported hearing noises resembling "loud snorings" in the small hours of 11 and 12 January 2012, leading to "apocalyptic theories". Apparently, residents in Budapest in Hungary and Conklin in Canada heard similar aerial noises on the same dates. It was suggested they could have been caused by HAARP (the High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program) based in Gakona, Alaska [see **FT174:14**]. *Singapore Star/Asia News Network, 23 Jan 2012.*

GOBLIN TERROR

Female students were sent home from St Sebastian School in Zimbabwe after a spate of goblin attacks. The *Bulawayo Chronicle* reported the tiny beasts appeared as humans before turning into baboons. One girl fell into a trance and when she recovered said a baboon tried to slap her. "We did not consider it a serious issue until more girls were attacked," said a staff member. *MX News (Sydney), 22 Feb 2012.*

GET THE WITCH!

Thousands of parents stormed a primary school in Harare, Zimbabwe, amid fears that pupils were being initiated into Satanism. Riot police were called after rumours spread that one child regularly changed into a snake, others were speaking in tongues and three were put in a trance. Parents claimed an unidentified woman had used witchcraft on the pupils. *Metro, 7 Mar 2012.*



MARTIN ROSS

Email from the grave

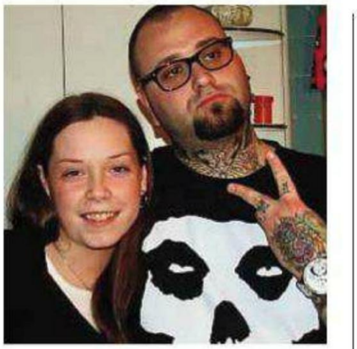
Messages are said to be too personal to have been faked

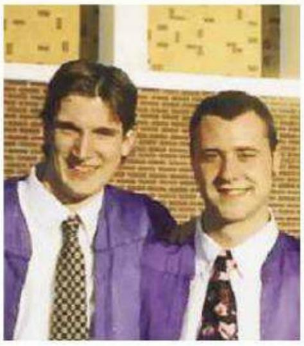
PICS COURTESY SARAH VEATER

Jack Froese, 32, died suddenly from heart arrhythmia in June 2011 – but five months later two friends received emails from his account, the specific nature of which appears to rule out a hoax. The family of the Pennsylvania man insisted no one had his account password and they didn't believe it had been hacked.

One of the email recipients was Tim Art of Dunmore, who said he and Jack had been "inseparable" for 17 years and right up to his death. "He was my right-hand man and best friend," he told the BBC. "One night in November [2011], I was sitting on my couch, going through my emails on my phone and it popped up, 'Sender Jack Froese'. I turned ghost-white when I read it. It was very quick and short but to a point that only Jack and I could relate on." The subject line was "I'm watching", and the message was: "Did you hear me? I'm at your house. Clean your f***ing attic!!!" Art said that shortly before his friend's death, the two had a conversation in his attic, during which Jack teased him over the mess and dust in it. No one else was present at the time. Art replied to the email, but has yet to hear back from his friend. "If somebody is joking around, I don't care because I take it whatever way I want," he said.

Jack's cousin Jimmy McGraw also received a posthumous email from him about an ankle injury that happened after his death. The email read: "Hey Jim, How ya doing? I knew you were gonna break your ankle, tried to warn you. Gotta be careful." McGraw said he had broken his ankle a week before he received the email on the night of 21 November. "I'd like to say Jack sent it, just because I look at it as he's gone, but he's still trying to connect with me," he said. "Trying to tell me to move along, to feel better." The email included another message for a friend, whom 'Jack' said he "couldn't get through to" because the "email didn't work".





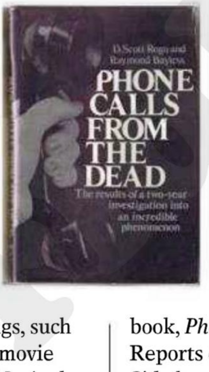
ABOVE: Jack Froese (Fröse) with sister Sarah Veater, and with friend Tim Art.

Jack's friends have accepted the messages "as a gift"

The source of the emails remains a mystery for Jack's family and friends, who say they could have chosen to investigate them further through their Internet provider but preferred "accepting them as a gift since they represented Jack's spirit". Commenting on the messages, Jack's mother Patty said: "I thought they were fantastic, they were great. They made some people happy, they upset some people – but to me, that's keeping people talking about him."

Sarah Veater, Jack's sister, also told *FT* that Jack had always been a prankster. She shared a few of her favourite practical jokes with us: "One Easter eve, Jack dressed as a bunny and had a bunch of little plastic bunnies around him as he stood in the middle of the road motioning to cars to slow down so they wouldn't hit his 'baby bunnies'. He used to change marquee signs to say different things, such as changing the title of a movie like *Dr. Dolittle* to *Dr. Do Me.* And one night he was sitting at the top of the stairs with a TV remote changing the channels on the TV while my dad was watching TV, making my dad agitated because he couldn't figure out what was going on – he did that for about 20 minutes." There are services – such as Dead Man's Switch – that promise to send emails to one's friends and relatives in the event of one's death, but the specific content of the messages in the Froese case appear to rule this out as an explanation. *D.Mail, 15 Mar 2012.*

• The dead have reportedly made use of every advance in technology in their effort to contact the living. The first account of a phantom telephone call appeared in the spiritualist journal *Borderland* in the autumn of 1896. A correspondent claimed that the message "Go to your father's house poor Nellie is dead" was heard over the telephone at the moment of his sister's death. Some believe such calls represent a form of EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomena) and that they are messages from the spirit world. The US parapsychologists D Scott Rogo and Raymond Bayless collected examples of such calls in their 1979 book, *Phone Calls from the Dead*. Reports of faxes from the Other Side have also reached *Fortean Times*, but we can't find them at the moment…


D Scott Rogo and Raymond Bayless
PHONE CALLS FROM THE DEAD
The results of a two-year investigation into an incredible phenomenon

SIDELINES…

DON'T MENTION THE WAR

A German company's plan to build a supermarket on the Isle of Wight was delayed by the discovery of landmines planted to prevent a Nazi invasion. Aldi wants to build on a site owned by the defence company BAE Systems, at Somerton, near Cowes, but its plan is on hold after surveyors found World War II pipe mines buried there. *D.Telegraph, 25 Nov 2011.*

IN A TIGHT SPOT

When Danielle Morgan, 18, a student of the University of Derby, fell off the bed of her flatmate, a wire clothes-horse fell on top of her and her head and shoulders got stuck in the frame. For an hour, university staff tried in vain to free her; firefighters had to use cutting equipment. She was left with bruising. *D.Telegraph, 24 Nov 2011.*

BABIES MYSTERY

Five women living on the same street – Waterdales in Northfleet, Kent – have given birth to babies with the same rare defect: gastroschisis, a condition where the bowels stick out through an opening in the abdomen, usually occurring no more than once in every 7,000 births. The cases occurred over a period of 12 years. A sixth child with the condition was born nearby. *Kentonline.co.uk, 14 Feb; D.Star, 23 Feb 2012.*

MONSTER RAT

A rat 30in (76cm) long was found dead in the rear of a Foot Locker shoe store in the Bronx, New York. Experts thought it might be a Gambian Pouched Rat – often kept as a pet. *Sun, 10 Jan 2012.*

BIG BOPPER BUSTED

On 5 January, police in Madison, Wisconsin, charged Beezow Doo-Doo Zopittybop-Bop-Bop, 30, with carrying a concealed knife, cannabis possession and a probation violation. Mr Zopittybop-Bop-Bop had legally changed his name from Jeffrey Drew Wilschke last October. *[AP] 9 Jan 2012.*

SIDELINES...

MASSIVE STATUE FOUND

A statue of Amenhotep III, grandfather of Tutankhamun, who ruled nearly 3,400 years ago, has been unearthed at the pharaoh's funerary temple on the west bank of the Nile in Luxor, Egypt. The 44ft (13.5m) tall statue is made of coloured quartzite. It is in several large pieces and when put together, will depict the king standing. *[AP] 2 Dec 2011*.

DOG SNATCH THWARTED

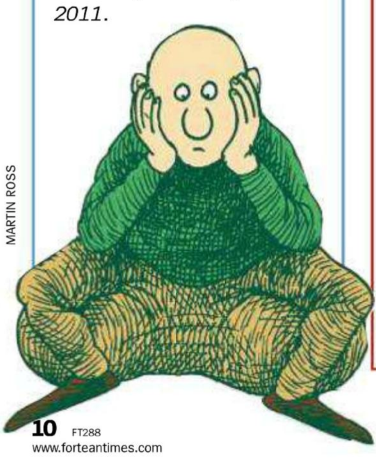
A dog owner beat off a golden eagle with a walking stick after it tried to snatch her Jack Russell in Barnburgh, South Yorkshire. The local RSPCA said it had received a call about another similar incident. *Sun, 13 Jan 2012*.

MONKEY BUSINESS

A Chinese circus apologised to a farmer whose vegetables were stolen every day for two weeks by a monkey riding a goat. Ye Shu, from Dongguan, Guangdong province, complained that the pair walked from the nearby circus. On reaching the farm, the monkey would stand on the goat's back to check the coast was clear before launching a raid. *Irish Examiner, 9 Jan 2012*.

WEIGHT BALLS

Wesley Warren, 47, has pleaded for help in raising £650,000 to have his 98lb (44kg) testicles removed. Mr Warren, who lives in Las Vegas, has had a rare infection of the lymph nodes in his scrotum for three years. He can't wear trousers and can barely walk. *Sun, 19 Oct 2011*.



MARTIN ROSS

FINICKY EATERS

FROM NEWSPAPER TO POLISH, FROM BRICKS TO SOFAS, PEOPLE EAT THE ODDEST THINGS

ABOVE: Tempestt Henderson enjoyed the clean feeling from eating soap. **FACING PAGE:** Adele Edwards was partial to a sofa snack.

- Anna Curran, 35, from Dundee, is expecting her fourth child in April and has developed a craving for newspapers – specifically the *Dundee Evening Telegraph*. She had tried snacking on other papers, but none has the local paper's distinctive taste and she couldn't eat anything else. "I just need to get the flavour of it," she said. "I could be sitting in the bingo hall and I'd start ripping out pages of the newspaper and all the people look at me going 'What is she doing?' I sit and tear the white bits off the edges and keep them in a bag so I can eat them while shopping." She stocks up on spare copies of the paper on Fridays because it doesn't appear at the weekends. *Metro, 17 Feb 2012*.

- Emma Veness, 26, a teaching assistant from Birmingham, seven months pregnant with her second child, had a craving for furniture polish, licking it from her fingers or sucking it from a duster at least three times a day. At the time of the news report, she had already polished off three cans. Asda Smart Price polish was her favourite – not too perfumed. She was diagnosed with pica, characterised by an appetite for non-nutritive substances. Sufferers have been known to compulsively eat metal, coins, chalk, batteries and even toothbrushes. It can often be caused by a mineral deficiency – which is why pregnant women often crave eating coal or earth when needing iron or other minerals. *Metro, Sun, 18 July 2011*.

"She can eat a brick just like a chocolate chip cookie"

- Another pica sufferer is three-year-old Natalie Hayhurst from Terre Haute, Indiana. "She can eat a brick like a normal person would eat a chocolate chip cookie," said her mother, Coleen. Mrs Hayhurst, 31, and husband David said their most frightening moment came when Natalie appeared with a bleeding mouth, holding a small piece of wire, all that was left of a light bulb. They rushed her to hospital to have the broken glass removed from her stomach. *Sun, 26 Sept; Metro, 27 Sept 2011*.

- Adele Edwards, 31, a mother of five from Bradenton, Florida, ate the foam inside sofa cushions every day since she was 10, a craving probably triggered by stress when her parents were on the brink of divorce. "In the last year I've eaten seven sofas," she said. "I unzip the cushions and snack on the foam inside. And once I start I just can't stop. But now doctors have told me that if I carry on, my addiction will kill me… I could get a stomach blockage so bad I'd go septic and my intestines could explode." At the time of the report, she was trying therapy and hypnosis to rid herself of the compulsion. She had recently been eating pieces of couch cushion 15 times a day, consuming the equivalent of a throw pillow every week. She had taken to rubbing the pieces of foam in earth. "The dirt makes it crunchier," she said. *dailymail.co.uk, 11 April 2011.*

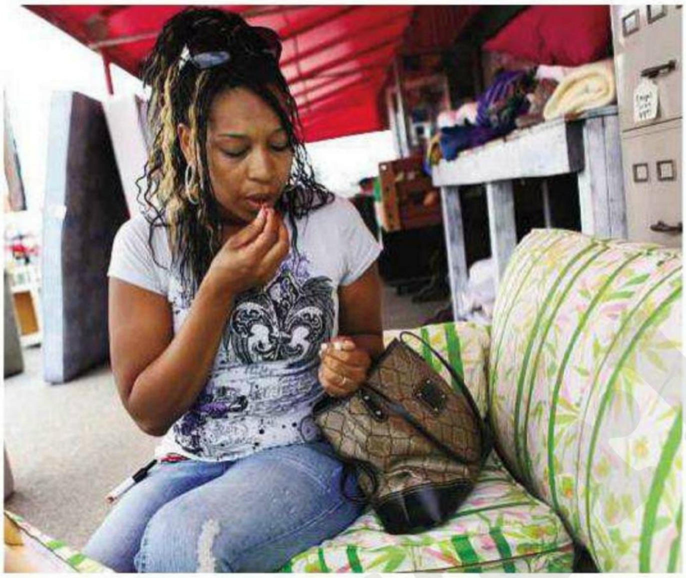
- "I remember the first time I dipped my fingers into the washing powder," said Tempestt [*sic*] Henderson, a 19-year-old nursing student from Florida. "I dabbed the powder onto my tongue and it tasted so sweet, and salty… it just felt so right. I was hooked straight away." Soon she had moved onto licking the bubbles of soap in the shower, too, a habit that was getting her through up to five bars of soap a week. "I love the clean feeling it gives me," she said. "Eating soap feels so much cleaner than just washing with it."

After six months, Tempestt sought medical advice and was told she had pica, probably triggered by stress after she split up with her boyfriend. She has been given intensive cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) to prevent her from compulsively reaching for soap. She has also been encouraged to go for long walks, avoiding places where soap is present, like bathrooms and laundrettes. She now hasn't eaten the stuff since September 2010. *dailymail.co.uk, 8 Feb 2012.*

- Kerry Trebilcock, 21, a dental nurse from Mylor, Cornwall, has eaten 4,000 washing-up sponges, usually topped with hot relish, BBQ sauce, ketchup, mustard, jam or honey. Sometimes, she dips them in tea or hot chocolate like biscuits. She has also chomped through more than 100 bars of organic fruit-flavoured soap, with lemon and lime her favourite. She has endured shocking stomach cramps, constipation and diarrhœa. It all began after a holiday to Morocco in 2008, when she picked up a hookworm infection. At first she craved junk food, but then turned to sponges and soap. Her infection was diagnosed by her GP but she kept quiet about her cravings in case he thought she was mad.

Kerry, who also eats normal food, finally confided to a friend in 2009. After seeing the doctor again, she was put on a programme of counselling and vitamins, but her recovery is a slow and arduous process. "I still have a one-inch square of sponge and three teaspoons of organic soap with each meal," she said. "But I am making progress and speak to other sufferers of pica on Internet forums, which helps." *Sun, 29 Feb 2012.*

- A young American widow, identified only as Casie, 26, was so obsessed by her late husband she couldn't stop herself from eating his ashes. She lost her husband, Shawn, several months earlier after he suffered a severe asthma attack. He story featured on *My Strange Addiction*, a reality show on US cable channel TLC. She couldn't stop herself dipping her finger into the urn that contained his ashes and taking a lick of the grey dust. She first tasted her husband's remains when she transferred his ashes from a temporary cardboard box into a special memorial urn. "Some of it spilled out on my hands," she said. "I didn't want to just wipe him away, so I just licked it off my fingers. And here I am today, almost two months later, and I can't stop." *MX News (Sydney), 9 Aug 2011.*


NEWSPIX / LEIGH WINBURN

- Stacey Irvine, 17, a factory worker from Castle Vale, Birmingham, lived on chicken nuggets and had eaten practically nothing else since she was two. The only other things to pass her lips were occasional chips, crisps, or slices of toast. She had never touched greens or fruit. She was taken to hospital in January after collapsing and struggling to breathe, and was found to have anæmia and swollen veins in her tongue. She is now on an urgent course of vitamins, which started in hospital with injections. *Sun, 26 Jan; D.Mail, 27 Jan 2012.*

- Claire Simmons, 33, of Notting Hill, west London, has eaten nothing but cheese and tomato pizza since the age of two. "I keep myself healthy with exercise and I drink a lot of water," she said. "But my doctor says I'm storing up many problems for the future due to a lack of vitamins and minerals. This could lead to a stroke or heart attack." *Sun, 13 Feb 2012.*

- Elsie Campbell, 59, from Derby, suddenly developed a craving for lettuce in 2004, eating up to four a day. This puzzled her husband Jim, a forensic scientist, who realised that a lack of the anti-cancer compound sulforaphane, found in lettuce and many other green vegetables, can often be a sign of breast cancer. Tests in hospital in early 2005 confirmed his suspicions; a small lump was surgically removed from one of her breasts, the cravings for lettuce stopped, and Mrs Campbell, a mother of three, made a full recovery. "I was so lucky Jim spotted the signs when he did," she said. "My lettuce addiction probably saved my life." *Metro, Sun, D.Mail, 2 Aug 2011.*

SIDELINES...

BEDLAM BOARD

A sane man has been living rent-free in a mental hospital in Iasi, Romania, for 80 years. Ilie Ciurcov, 87, said: "I always meant to leave but it was so comfortable, I just kept quiet." Officials said his mother had left him there aged seven. *D.Mirror, Metro, 10 Feb 2012.*

FOOD OF LOVE

British chef Charlie Bigham has created a pie made with bulls' testicles for Valentine's Day. Cock and Bull Pie, "rich in testosterone", costs £7.99. Bulls' balls have a long history in Chinese traditional medicine as an aphrodisiac. The pie also contains ginseng and Mama Juana liquor, and is being sold by Ocado.com. *Sun, 7 Feb; MX News (Sydney), 9 Feb 2012.*

BATS BOMB CHRISTIANS

St Hilda's Church in Ellerburn, North Yorkshire, has had to suspend services for the first time in more than 1,000 years after bats drove the congregation out. They had covered the altar with droppings, eroded the pews with their urine and excreted on the congregation. Some worshippers had fallen ill after coming into contact with bat waste. *D.Telegraph, 10 Aug 2011.*

SUSPICIOUS SPUD

Police in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, were called to investigate a "suspicious-looking item" in a resident's back yard. The *Steamboat Today* reported: "Police officers investigated the item and determined it was a potato". *Sunday Times, 11 Mar 2012.*

SIDELINES…

MONSTER PROBLEM

The plan to build a tunnel in Auckland, New Zealand, is facing opposition from spokesmen for a monster thought to be living under the city. The Maori Statutory Board argued that the $2.6 billion plan didn't respect Horotiu, a *teniwha* who was "here first". Board member Glenn Wilcox warned the creature was likely "to get up and bite" if it didn't like the project. *(Brisbane) Courier-Mail, 29 Dec 2011.*

LONG MARCH

A Chinese postwoman has covered 200,000km (124,000 miles) in 25 years single-handedly delivering the mail to a county of 20,000 people in the southern province of Jiangxi. Luo Xiying, 43, alternates between a 40km (25 mile) round on foot through steep mountains in Chengfang and a 70km (43 mile) round which she can partly travel by bike since a road was built in 2010. She works a 14-and-a-half hour day for £105 a month. *D.Telegraph, 26 July 2012.*

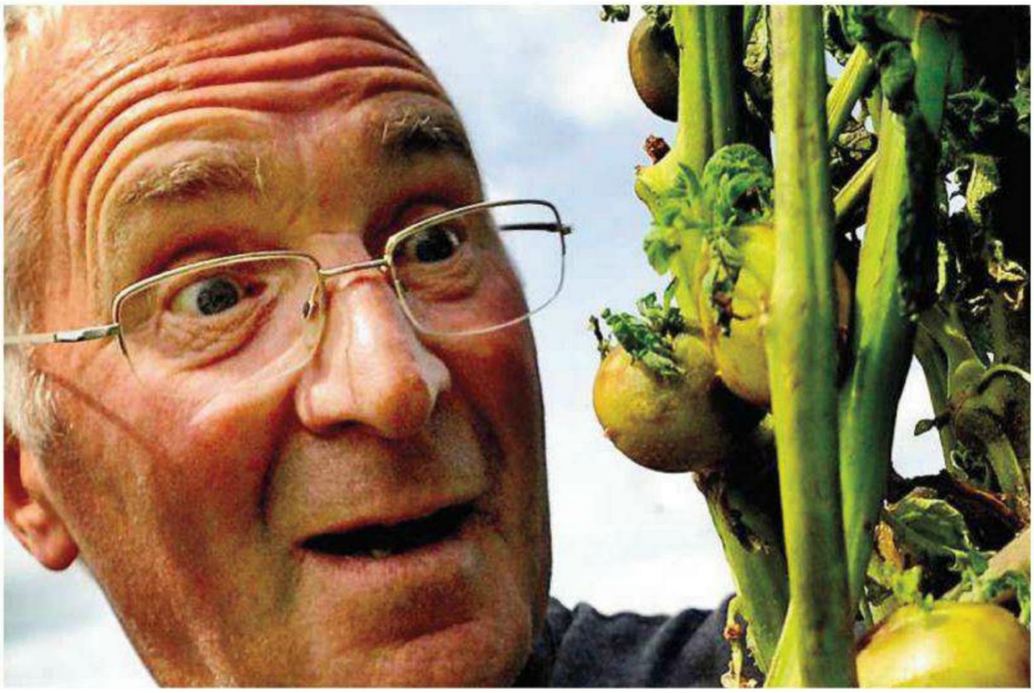
CAT THWACK

An 85-year-old woman in Argentina was left fighting for her life with a fractured skull after a cat thrown out of a fourth-floor apartment landed on her head. The incident happened in the Belgrano neighbourhood of Buenos Aires when, during a dispute, a man grabbed the family cat and threw it at his wife. She ducked and the pet sailed through an open window. *[AFP] 16 Jan 2012.*

ICE MAN BUSTED

On 27 January, police in Chile arrested a man on suspicion of stealing five tonnes of ice from the Jorge Montt glacier in Patagonia. They intercepted a refrigerated truck with an estimated £3,900 worth of ice allegedly bound for bars and restaurants in Santiago, to be used as designer ice cubes. Scientists say Jorge Montt is retreating by half a mile a year, making it one of the world's fastest shrinking glaciers. *Guardian, 1 Feb 2012.*

PLANT PRODIGIES



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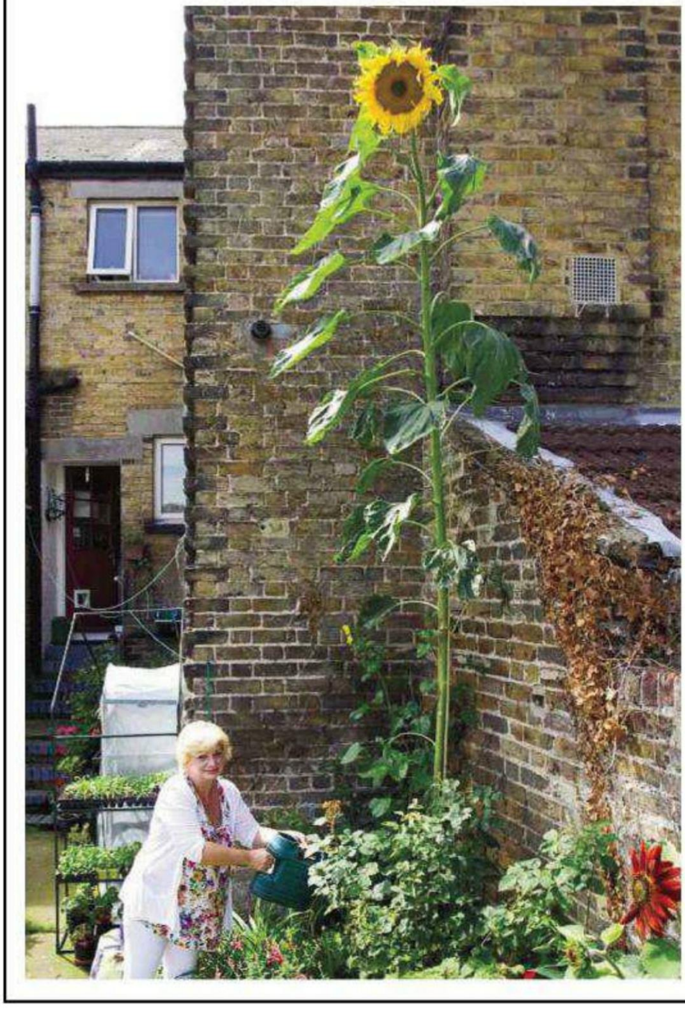

BOURNEMOUTH NEWS & PICTURES

POTATO PUZZLER

When Henry Brown came to harvest the potatoes from his garden in Hinton St George, Somerset, he was baffled by one of the plants. Instead of producing the spuds underground as expected, it had borne them on the stem, like a tree bearing fruit. "I think my plant isn't sure whether it's a potato or a tomato," said Mr Brown. "I'm 72 and have been gardening for a very long time and I've never seen anything like this before. It's really weird. The potatoes are a bit brown and not very big. I would certainly not cook them up for dinner." *Western Daily Press, 8 July 2011.*

SOARING SUNFLOWER

Eve Fielding, 48, expected the sunflower seed she planted in her garden in Margate, Kent, to produce a plant of about 12ft (3.8m), but at the time of the news reports the "Eiffel Flower", as she called it, stood 23ft (7m) tall and was still growing. "I watered it every day," she said, "but I didn't put anything special in the soil or anything daft." It was approaching the world record of 26ft 4½in (8.04m), noted on 17 August 2009, for a plant belonging to Hans-Peter Schiffer from Kaarst-Voorst in Germany. *D.Mail, Metro, 16 Aug 2011.*

How to Become a Successful Writer!

Your
Photo
Here
Published

By Marian Ashcroft

If you've ever fancied being a writer but don't know where to start – here's the answer. For the past twenty-three years The Writers Bureau has been running a home-study Creative Writing course that teaches ordinary people how to write, get published and earn an extra income.

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Tim Skelton "Besides seeing my first book in print, I've appeared in The Times and The Independent, and updated yet more guide-books for Fodor's, Thomas Cook, and the AA. I am writing flat–out, and getting paid what I can now describe with pride as a decent salary. And it is thanks to The Writers Bureau that I got this chance. It provided me with the opportunity to realise an ambition which I didn't know how to nurture. I do now."

Published

Anne Perdeaux "This has been my first full year as a writer, and I am thrilled with my earnings at this stage – £1589.80 for 2010 – especially as I'm still only half-way through the course. I love being able to tell people that I'm a 'freelance writer'. After 40 years of working I've finally found a job I love!"

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Chris Green "I've had 30 pieces of work accepted by various publications since I started my Writers Bureau course – a mere 18 months ago. I contemplate that fact and I am amazed to have come so far in such a short time. Thanks to the careful and patient tutoring provided by The Writers Bureau and the boundless confidence this has given me, I can continue to explore my potential and see where it takes me."

Published

Lucy Costigan "This course has so far been simply amazing and has given me the confidence to send in my work to several leading, glossy magazines. My tutor has given me fantastic support and brilliant feedback on every one of my assignments. I find it hard to believe that I have already had four articles published."

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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

FURTHER UPDATES ON STORIES PREVIOUSLY COVERED IN *FORTEAN TIMES*

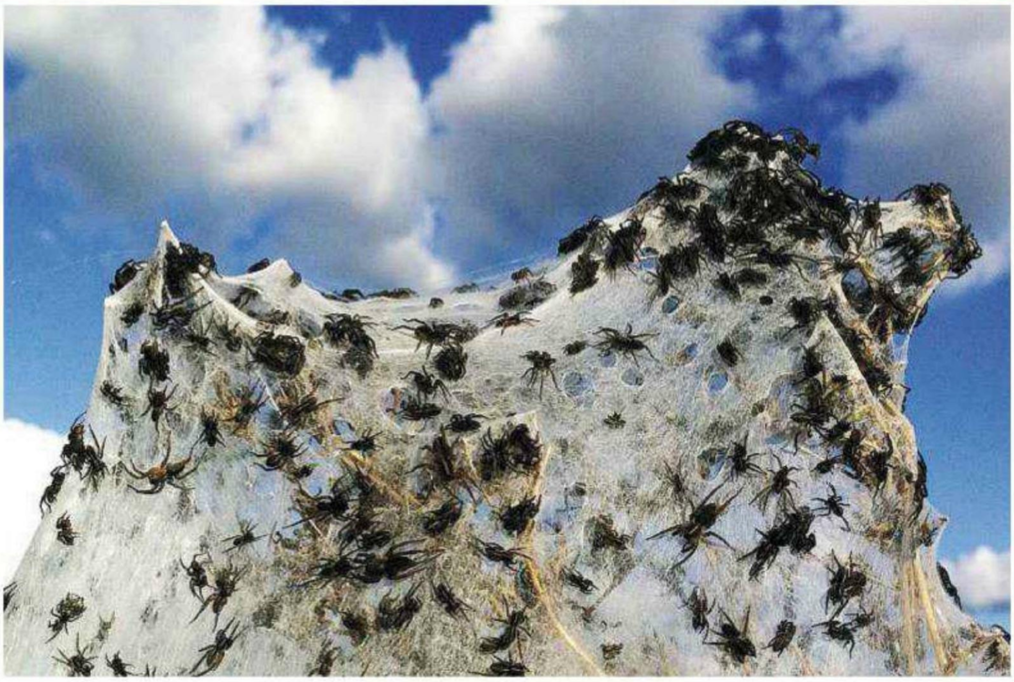
WONDER WEBS [FT171:6]

ForteanTimes
TWIN TELEPATHY

Thousands of spiders formed a vast web (right) shrouding farm paddocks in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, in a stunning side-effect of devastating floods in March 2012 that led to the evacuation of 9,000 people. The tiny arachnids, fleeing the floodwaters to higher ground, clustered over grasslands on the edge of the swollen Murrumbidgee River in the Riverina region. The same thing was observed last year in Pakistan following flooding.

Australian Museum spider expert Graham Milledge said the phenomenon was caused by spiders "ballooning" – when they let out a thread of silk that catches in the wind and carries them through the air. "Juvenile spiders do it as a way of dispersing but it also seems to be associated with flood events," he said. The arachnids in this case were likely to include money spiders (which dwell in herbage) and juvenile wolf spiders (ground-dwelling hunters). "It's not a natural situation," he said. "I would imagine they would be trying to disperse again as quickly as possible. These mass webs don't seem to last long." However, they were still there a week later. The spiders were actually doing quite a bit of good by feasting on mosquitoes and other insect populations that had boomed with the increased moisture brought about by the rising waters. *The Sideshow, news.ninemsn.com.au, 7 Mar; (Sydney) D.Telegraph, 13 Mar 2012.*

Spiders' webs covering 60 acres (24ha) were reported in British Columbia in 2002 [**FT171:6**], and others covering hundreds of yards of trees and shrubs in north Texas in 2007 [**FT233:7**].



REUTERS / DANIEL MUNOZ

RELIC THEFT [FT286:20]

Making off with holy relics seems to be all the rage in Ireland in recent months. Last October, three supposed fragments of the True Cross went missing from Holy Cross Abbey in Thurles, Co Tipperary, before being recovered by the gardaí on 19 January 2012 in undisclosed circumstances.

ForteanTimes

• On 30 January, a bronze reliquary that normally contains a shard of St Brigid's skull and is said to be worth 10,000 euros, was unscrewed from the altar of St Brigid's Church in Killester, Co. Dublin. St Brigid (AD 450–525), abbess of Kildare, is one of Ireland's three patron saints. Fortuitously, officials had removed the bone fragment a few weeks earlier and placed it in a safe while the reliquary was being cleaned in preparation for St Brigid's Day celebrations on 1 February. Three Irish knights had taken St Brigid's skull to Portugal in the 13th century. It was placed in a church at Lumiar, outside Lisbon, where it remains. In 1928, the Cardinal of Lisbon gave a small portion of the relic to Killester when it was decided to dedicate the local church to the saint. A shoe allegedly belonging to Brigid – made of silver and brass and set with jewels – is kept in the National Museum in Dublin.

• Sometime during the night of 2 March, the preserved heart of Dublin's patron saint was stolen from the city's Christ Church Cathedral. The thief used metal cutters to prise open the iron bars protecting the wooden heart-shaped box (above) holding the heart of St Laurence O'Toole, a major draw for pilgrims since the 13th century. There were no initial signs of any alarms or break-ins at the cathedral, although one staff member did see a candle alight when they arrived to open the church. It is thought that the thief had spent the night in the cathedral. As he (or they) ignored gold chalices, gold candlesticks, and cash boxes, the Dean of Christ Church, the Very Revd Dermot Dunne, speculated that the heart may have been stolen to order for a religious fanatic.

St Laurence O'Toole was born Lorcán Ua Tuathail in Castledermot, Co. Kildare, in 1128. He was appointed Archbishop of Dublin in 1162 and died in Normandy in 1180. He was an ascetic who wore a hair shirt, never ate meat and fasted every Friday. Each Lent he spent 40 days in St Kevin's Cell, a sort of cave, near Glendalough, Co. Wicklow, where he had previously been abbot. He was canonised by Pope Honorius III in 1225, after reports of miracles at his original gravesite, and the following year his heart was taken to Dublin and preserved in Christ Church

Cathedral.

His skull was brought back to Britain in 1442. His bones were interred at the parish church of Chorley, Lancashire, now called the Church of St Laurence, but they disappeared during the Reformation.

- Over Christmas, several thousand euros were stolen from St Brigid's Church in Limerick between Christmas night and St Stephen's Day. A safe containing three chalices was also stolen from Parteen Church, Co. Clare, between Christmas night and St Stephen's Day. *Irish Examiner, 1 Feb; Irish Times, 1 Feb, 3+6 Mar; BBC News, 3 Mar 2012.*

THE NULLARBOR NYMPH [FT223:20]

ForteanTimes
English Gothic
Hammer

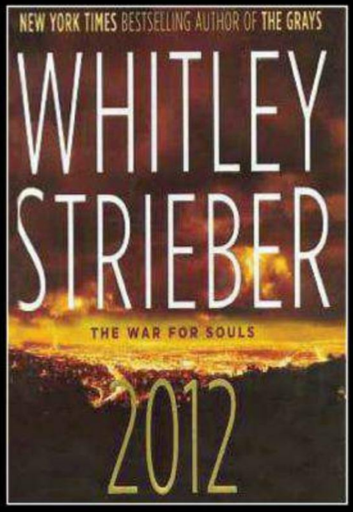
In 1971, the story of a beautiful young woman living among kangaroos on Australia's Nullarbor Plain made international headlines. The 'Nullarbor Nymph' was captured in grainy footage wearing a roo-skin bikini and running with the bounding marsupials. A year later, the story was revealed as a hoax by Laurie Scott and Ron Sells to boost trade at a remote Outback motel in Eucla. The story has now been turned into a film, directed by Mathew Wilkinson from Ceduna, a coastal town in South Australia. It stars Sydney actress Jessica Sterling (pictured below in a still from the film) as the nymph (played in the original spoof footage by Scott's wife Geneice). The film had its premier at Thevenard Football Club on 3 March 2012. *(Adelaide) Sunday Mail, 5 Feb 2012.*

2012 WATCH

PETER BROOKESMITH ON THE LITERARY OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY 2012

PLOT-SPOILERS FOR THE GREATER GOOD

Like pseudoscientist Richard Hoagland [**FT287:17**], abductee Whitley Strieber has grabbed the opportunity offered by the approaching 2012 apocalypse-*cum*-non-event to remind his fans of his existence and keep the royalties flowing. As any writer must. In two books, Strieber has set his own brand of interdimensional expertise to work on the problem – although, perhaps prudently, he presents his wisdom here as fiction.



Beyond 2012 (Tor 2010) is certainly fiction – a rather dire, unevenly paced thriller in which 21/12/12 passes without incident. The trouble starts in 2020, when huge solar flares disrupt civilisation-as-we-know-it. But the inmates of a lunatic asylum turn out to be initiates of an esoteric cult who amalgamate love and science (symbolism, eh – geddit?), and can save the world by manipulating space and time. At least, they save the *quite* good people left behind after a Rapture in which the *really* virtuous are lifted heavenward by flying saucers driven by angels. The wicked, who include "the Seven Families, to whom this world belongs", develop nasty black marks on their skin, and their souls sink to the hot-as-hell Earth's core. And that's that.

Strieber was already on the 2012 bandwagon in 2007, with *2012: The War for Souls*, which if nothing else shows he didn't get where he is today without a virtuoso command of the cliché. Eyes gleam "as black as obsidian", while a US President snaps "That is an urgent question. Possibly the most urgent question in the history of the world." Remarkably, no one says, "I don't know, but I aim to find out." When not writing with all the sparkle of a stale old sock, he can also slide into creative meaninglessness, as when a lover's eyes are "fluttering closed in the cathedral of their kiss", or creepy sentimentality – "Love is the greatest treasure... Most everything is forgotten in death... But love is not left behind. Jacob's Ladder has another name in heaven. It is Love." Oh aye.

But Strieber pulls a neat trick in his plotting. For who can this character Wiley Dale possibly be – "a writer by trade, but [with] the speed and power of a soldier about him" – who happens to have been well-mocked for a work in which he described being rectally reamed by reptilian aliens? Now he's channelling a novel about an alternative Earth where the pre-1914 empires still flourish and the USA is in the van – in vain – of 'green' nations. Unfortunately, it's also riddled with reptilian aliens, who are capturing the souls of good folk, and plotting to use the interdimensional window that opens on 21/12/12 to take over Wiley's world (*alias* ours). Wiley grasps that this is all *actually happening* and his characters on the otherworld are real too. In due course, indeed, they come to visit him. Modestly, he realises, "I'm the balancing force between the positive and negative earths."

A few naughty reptiles have slipped through to our Earth already: among them Robert Mugabe (quite so). No mention of our own dear Queen, which is a relief. Various upheavals occur, gunfights, kidnappings, *etc.*, but Wiley finally realises that *he's* a reptilian too – only a good one, from the aliens' home world. The great day arrives. Captured souls are released by our heroes in the nick of time. Death is no more (except for bad aliens). All ends happily.

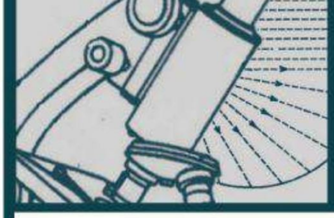
Um – yes, Whitley, quite. But are you telling us too that you're *really* a reptilian alien, as well as the saviour of the planet?

CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

THE REPTILE SHOW

Another prolific author has also climbed aboard the 2012 bandwagon. But what exactly does the celebratedly strange David Icke have to say on the subject? The heart quickened to see a link to "The Biggest Event of the 2012 Great Awakening" on his website. Said event turns out to be – wait for it – Icke's gala appearance at Wembley Arena in October. So you'll have to part with some hard cash to discover how Icke has worked 2012 into his dog-and- pony-and-reptile show.

Worldmags.net



MATT PATTINSON

THE DINGO DETECTIVES

In a famous Australian court case, a mother was convicted of murdering her baby, then later acquitted on appeal. **DAVID HAMBLING** examines the evidence against the wild dog.

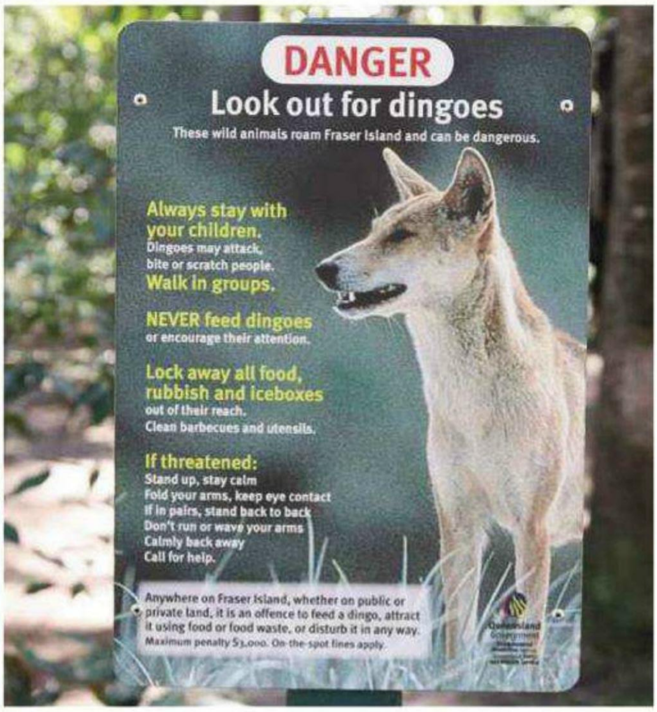
In February, a new inquest was opened on the Azaria Chamberlain case [**FT49:10**], 30 years after Lindy Chamberlain was convicted of murdering her baby daughter and 24 years after she was cleared. Chamberlain has always claimed that two-month-old Azaria was dragged away from their campsite in 1982 by a dingo. Folklore, myth and speculation have tended to swamp the facts of the matter, perhaps inevitably with a primal topic like babies attacked by animals. This time, science might help illuminate the inquest – or obscure it.

The last inquest in 1995 recorded an open verdict.[1] Chamberlain said she saw a dingo dragging something away, and the baby's jacket was later found close to a dingo den; but there was not enough evidence to convict either her or the dingo.

Dingoes have long been accused of attacking humans. In 1872, a farmer claimed to have fought off a pack of 30 with the help of another man. An 1884 newspaper report claimed that dingo attacks were on the rise, but didn't cite specific cases. In 1889, a boy claimed to have driven off a dingo that attacked him by pulling its ears. There were no documented killings.

In 1933, when three girls went missing, the local cattlemen doubted whether dingoes could be responsible. In fact, they had never heard of a case of humans being attacked by dingoes, and the president of the United Graziers Association believed the odds of dingo involvement were a million-to-one against. This was the situation when Chamberlain was first tried, but since then the dingo's reputation has worsened.

"Basically, the significant thing that has happened since the last inquest is that there have been at least 12 significant attacks, three deaths," Stuart Tipple, a lawyer representing the Chamberlains, told the media. These numbers seem high. Online sources yield details of only one death, a nine-year-old boy called Clinton Gage killed by two dingoes in 2001 on Fraser Island. Last year, a three-year-old girl was savaged by two dingoes, also on Fraser Island.


DANGER
Look out for dingoes
These wild animals roam Fraser Island and can be dangerous.
Always stay with your children.
Dingoes may attack, bite or scratch people.
Walk in groups.
NEVER feed dingoes or encourage their attention.
Lock away all food, rubbish and iceboxes out of their reach.
Clean barbecues and utensils.
If threatened:
Stand up, stay calm
Fold your arms, keep eye contact
If in pairs, stand back to back
Don't run or wave your arms
Calmly back away
Call for help.
Anywhere on Fraser Island, whether on public or private land, it is an offence to feed a dingo, attract it using food or food waste, or disturb it in any way. Maximum penalty $3,000. On-the-spot fines apply.
Queensland Government

THEGIRLSNY / CREATIVE COMMONS

Dingoes are not native Australian animals as was once thought, but were brought by human settlers from Asia several thousand years ago. There is still a population of wild dingoes in Thailand. *Canis lupus dingo* is a subspecies of wolf, just like the domestic dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*), and the two can interbreed. They are not the only canid accused of attacking babies.

In an incident in South London in 2011, Pauline Koupparis heard her twin daughters crying, and says she found a fox in their bedroom. Both girls had sustained serious facial injuries, apparently from bites. In 2002, a baby in Dartford was supposedly attacked by a fox inside a house.[2]

As with Azaria Chamberlain, we have to rely on witnesses rather than forensic evidence, so it's impossible to verify whether foxes were actually present. Those familiar with foxes were doubtful. Talking about the 2011 incident to the BBC, wildlife expert John Bryant said that he had heard of only two similar attacks in 40 years – and one turned out to be a German Shepherd, the other a cat.[3] As other fortean wildlife studies have shown, for example with Alien Big Cats, people can be very easily mistaken even at close range.

Last year, a three-year-old girl was savaged by dingoes on Fraser Island

A few weeks after the Koupparis case, a three-year-old boy was reportedly bitten in a playground by a fox after stroking its tail.[4] Few foxes would let themselves be stroked, leading to suspicions it was a cat or dog. There is a marked tendency to blame 'wild' animals for attacks carried out by domestic or feral dogs; one US study suggested that wolves were responsible for less than half the reported "wolf attacks" on livestock.

According to Australian anthropologist Merryl Parker, in aboriginal folklore dingoes can be dangerous to babies or frail old people.[5] She believes the aborigines have a much deeper knowledge of dingoes than the white settlers. Unfortunately, folklore is notoriously unreliable. European folklore dating back at least to the 17th century suggests that cats "suck the breath" from sleeping babies and smother them,[6] a belief which is now discredited. In a case last year, an open verdict was recorded in a case when a five-month-old baby died in a household with cats. The chance of a cat being responsible was relegated to a "theoretical possibility".[7]

In the Chamberlain case, it is argued that the problem is not that dingoes are wild animals but that they are too tame. Fraser Island, site of some of the best-documented attacks, is a tourist spot, and local dingoes have little fear of humans. The visitors like to get close to dingoes and this can cause problems. In the Chamberlain case, there was reportedly a dingo-domestic dog hybrid at the campsite that may have previously attacked children. However, the animal disappeared afterwards.

Azaria's clothing was found some 4km (2½ miles) from the campsite where she was abducted. The forensic evidence remains confused, with many of the original findings being discredited, and of course the evidence is long gone. An earlier inquest suggested an attempt to simulate a dingo attack.

Scientists are now more receptive to the idea that dingoes can attack children, and there's certainly more evidence that such attacks do occur. This proves nothing in the Chamberlain case, except perhaps to give a literal version of the old saying "Give a dog a bad name and hang him". We will see what the new inquest finds.

NOTES

1 1995 Inquest report: http://bit.ly/HsT8iz (www.lindychamberlain.com).

2 BBC news report: http://bbc.in/HrYOus.

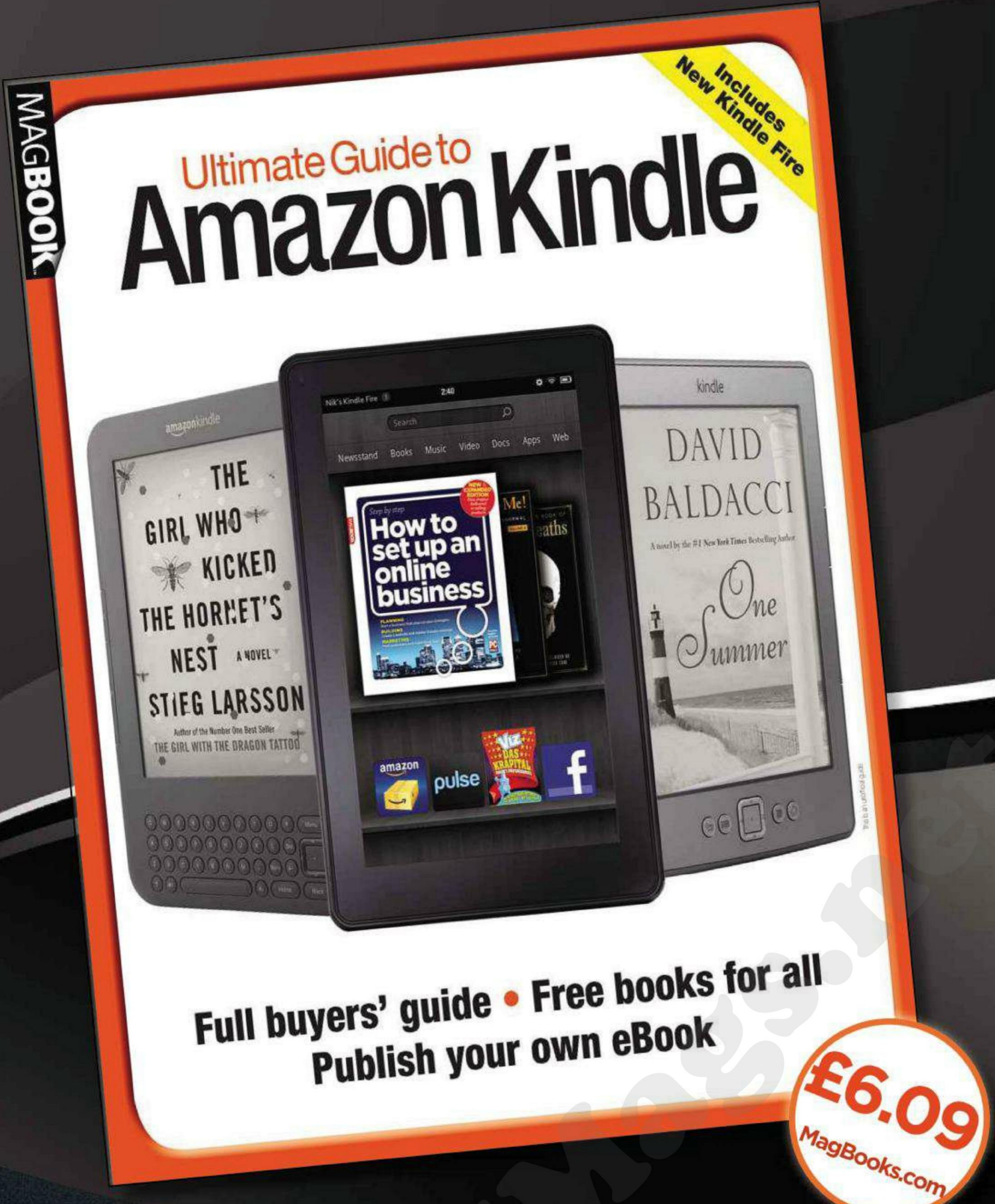
3 BBC news report: http://bbc.in/cbZvV7.

4 Metro: http://bit.ly/bBW9KF.

5 "Bringing the dingo home: discursive representations of the dingo by aboriginal, colonial and contemporary Australians": http://bit.ly/GVGoSS (eprints.utas.edu.au)

6 Snopes: http://bit.ly/bAaHZF.

7 Wales Online news: http://bit.ly/hAthsE.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MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE wonders why some people still fail to engage with the Enfield case evidence.

ENFIELD AND THE 'SKEPTICS'

A rare television appearance by 'Janet X' (formerly Janet Harper) who was the focus of the Enfield Poltergeist in 1977–78 occurred on 6 February to launch a week-long series, *The Supernatural*, as part of ITV's daily *Morning Today* programme. The show brought together Janet, who was aged 11 at the time of the famous poltergeist outbreak in 1977, and Guy Lyon Playfair, who originally investigated the case, along with the late Maurice Grosse (see **FT32:47–48**; **33:4–5**, **11**; **166:39**; **229:58–59**). In addition to a wide range of well-attested and recorded poltergeist incidents, including raps, object movements, fires and levitations, many detailed in Playfair's book *This House Is Haunted* (1980, 2009), the Enfield case was distinguished by recordings of a strange voice, resembling that of an old man, which emerged from Janet, and which has never been satisfactorily explained. At the time, this was considered unique, but subsequently studies of poltergeist literature reveal similar instances, albeit separated geographically by many miles and decades.

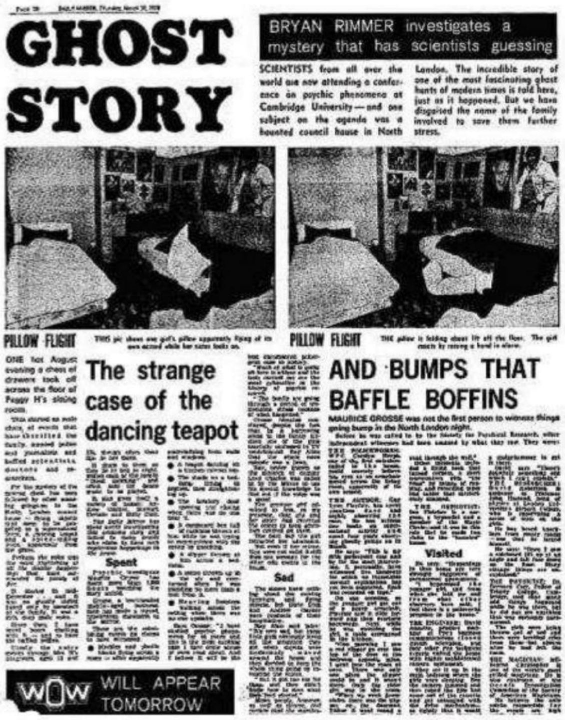
Also participating in the programme was Deborah Hyde, who lately has taken over editorship of *The Skeptic* magazine and who rejected paranormal interpretations of what occurred at Enfield between 1977–78.

It might be thought such a programme provided a welcome opportunity for a leading 'skeptic' to question and cross-examine two of the key individuals about what they saw and experienced. However, Hyde avoided any detailed challenge to either witness, preferring to speak in general terms about the fallibilities in human testimony and citing historic cases as the Hydesville rappings (1848), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's endorsement of the Cottingley Fairies (1925) and the *Amityville Horror* (1975) as the reasons for rejecting any claims of poltergeist activity at Enfield. As a result, the chance to test the credibility and reliability of two key witnesses in Britain's most famous 20th-century poltergeist case was lost.

However, Hyde did advance three other grounds for rejecting a paranormal interpretation of the Enfield poltergeist. These were that: (1) members of the Society for Psychical Research expressed doubts about the paranormality of the case in a report, with long-standing member Mary-Rose Barrington being named by Hyde in this context; (2) poltergeist activity can never be replicated; and (3) a tape recorder at Enfield had been tampered with.

How do these objections stand up to scrutiny?

Firstly, I contacted Barrington who stated in an email to me regarding the report: "I remember the sort of conclusions I came to and wrote about in the final seven pages or so of the EPIC [Enfield Poltergeist Investigation Committee] which made it clear that, though we may have had some reservations, we were all impressed by a lot of the testimony and all thought that genuine poltergeist activity had occurred." To confirm what the report said, I spoke to Dr Peter Hallson, another of the report's authors. He also confirmed that investigators took the view that genuine poltergeist activity took place at Enfield (*pers. comm. 9 Feb; 1 Mar 2012*). Indeed, the late Maurice Grosse (obit. **FT219:24–25**) had previously cited the EPIC report when challenged over the credibility of the Enfield case in 2000 (see correspondence in the *Journal of the SPR* vol.64, 192), which is perhaps conclusive of its positive opinion and findings.



GHOST STORY

BRYAN RIMMER investigates a mystery that has scientists guessing

SCIENTISTS from all over the world are now attending a conference on psychic phenomena at Cambridge University — and one subject on the agenda was a haunted council house in North London. The incredible story of one of the most fascinating ghost haunts of modern times is told here, just as it happened. But we have disguised the name of the family involved to save them further stress.

PILLOW FLIGHT

PILLOW FLIGHT

ONE hot August evening a chest of drawers took off across the floor of Peggy H's sitting room.

The strange case of the dancing teapot

AND BUMPS THAT BAFFLE BOFFINS

MAURICE GROSSE was not the first person to witness things going bump in the North London night.

Spent

Sad

Visited

WOW WILL APPEAR TOMORROW

ABOVE: The *Daily Mirror* reports on "one of the most fascinating ghost haunts of modern times", in March 1978.

With regard to replicating poltergeist activity, there were further tests with Janet via the Causley hospital in 1979–1980, one of which suggested a paranormal effect; but an even larger body of research exists concerning experiments conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s in the case of Matthew Manning, who was the centre of a poltergeist outbreak while at school. Manning was later extensively tested in laboratories in Britain and abroad, with researchers turning up what they considered to be significant evidence of his psi abilities. However, it might be better to start by looking at and understanding the initial Enfield data before raising questions of replication.

On the question of tape recordings, I confirmed that there are still extant a great many recordings made on different machines at Enfield. So the questions remains open – what tampering, on which tape-recorder and when?

Regarding the *Morning Today* interview, Deborah Hyde stated to me via email (16 Feb 2012): "I wanted to point out that there was not a total consensus about Enfield. I find the process of narrative enormously interesting, as you can probably tell from my talk with its multiple references to folklore. I think it's often observable, in life, that the best story survives". But the broadcast illustrates how the 'skeptical' case against Enfield on television has failed to progress in 25 years. Back on 31 October 1987, Channel 4 broadcast a two-hour documentary headed by psychologist Nicholas Humphrey entitled *Is There Anybody There?* The Enfield poltergeist was included amid a collection of religious and pseudo-scientific claims such as the Cottingley Fairies, the Hydesville rappings and the Rendlesham UFO case.

Such treatment of the Enfield case immediately generated strong complaints of misrepresentation, inaccuracy and bias. These came from two members of the Society for Psychical Research, late Enfield investigator Maurice Grosse and... the same Mary-Rose Barrington who was wrongly cited on *Morning Today* by Hyde as a critic of the paranormality in the Enfield case! (Barrington described the Channel 4 programme as a "Hallowe'en hatchet job").

Subsequently, their complaints were transmitted on Channel 4's *Right To Reply* show broadcast on 7 November 1987, with Grosse seeking a studio confrontation with Humphrey. Unfortunately, Humphrey declined to appear (a pity since an original objection to the validity of the Enfield poltergeist voice published in 1980 rested on its remarks about the female menstrual cycle – a curious ground for objection). Instead, Karl Sabbagh, the producer of the show and a member of the 'skeptical' organisation CSICOP (now re-named CSI – the Center for Skeptical Inquiry) joined remotely by way of a transatlantic link. Sabbagh too claimed that it was a case of witness unreliability and that psi effects were not replicable. In rebuttal, Grosse pointed out that key testimony and recordings had been ignored all along, including the tests conducted following help via the Maudsley Hospital in London with Janet, which Sabbagh didn't know about.

Afterwards, Grosse declared that if Channel 4 wanted to redeem itself, the opportunity existed for making a serious programme looking at Enfield. However, that would require examining the accumulated recordings and data, which 'skeptics' were clearly reluctant to do. In fact, it was 20 years before Channel 4 aired such a programme, a documentary entitled *Interview with a Poltergeist*, transmitted in March 2007, six months after Grosse's death in 2006.

An illustration of the 'skeptical' reluctance to examine evidence occurred in 1995, when journalist Mike Hutchinson co-wrote with Simon Hoggart a book entitled *Bizarre Beliefs*. It included sections on astrology, platform mediums, the Cottingley Fairies, and a few paragraphs dismissing Enfield. When challenged for his failure to re-interview the original witnesses, Hutchinson wrote to the *JSPR*, stating: "So why would they change their minds? Indeed, what would change their minds? No-one can recreate the events for them with trickery under exactly the same conditions of unpreparedness and atmosphere". (*JSPR* vol.62, 377–79 1997–98.)

It might be observed that if this attitude had been taken with witnesses in a number of high-profile miscarriages of justice, quite a few innocent people would remain in jail. More pertinently, the reason why historic claims such as the Cottingley Fairies and the Amityville Horror are not given any credence today is precisely because researchers *did* actually take the trouble to go and investigate, including assessing the witnesses concerned and analysing the alleged evidence. Their only remaining significance in psi research today is as emotive props brandished by 'skeptics'. Unfortunately, with the exception of Dr Melvyn Willin, I know of no 'sceptic' or 'skeptic' who in a quarter of a century has been prepared to examine even a small part of the original Enfield recordings or question surviving witnesses.

This case is not mere folklore or tradition but one with evidence and witnesses, together with recordings and contemporaneous documentation available to be assessed. However, judged by its performance so far, organised 'skepticism' in the UK is never going to convincingly explain the Enfield poltergeist, certainly if its critics are not acquainted with the facts, do not question the original witnesses and never make even a cursory examination of the collected evidence. In this case, the purveyors of tradition may appear to be organised 'skeptics'.

But what about that one sceptical exception, Dr Melvyn Willin, who has examined some of the Enfield data, notably audio recordings? His opinion given to me in an email on this is interesting: "Yes, having listened to all the tapes (over 100) and sifted through Maurice's letters etc., I changed my mind from being dismissive ('It's kids mucking about') to believing that there was far more to this case than simple tomfoolery." (*pers. comm., 14 Feb 2012*.)

Of further significance on the tape recordings is the discovery that raps recorded at Enfield in 1977–78 contain an anomalous acoustic signature that has been found in other poltergeist recordings. This effect was identified in 2010 by Dr Barrie Colvin, and is detectable only on an instrumental analysis. The effect shows up on samples of the raps at Enfield attributed to the poltergeist, but not with raps deliberately made by the contemporary investigators in response, trying to encourage the phenomena. If the Enfield raps were a trick, how were they accomplished? And how did the postulated hoaxer have the advanced knowledge to create an effect detectable only by instrumental analysis, and only identified some 33 years later? (See Barrie Colvin: "The Acoustic Properties of Unexplained Rapping Sounds" in *JSPR* [2010] vol.73.2, no.899, pp65–93; **FT265:5**.)

With thanks to Mary-Rose Barrington, Dr Peter Hallson, Deborah Hyde, Guy Lyon Playfair, Dr Melvyn Willin.

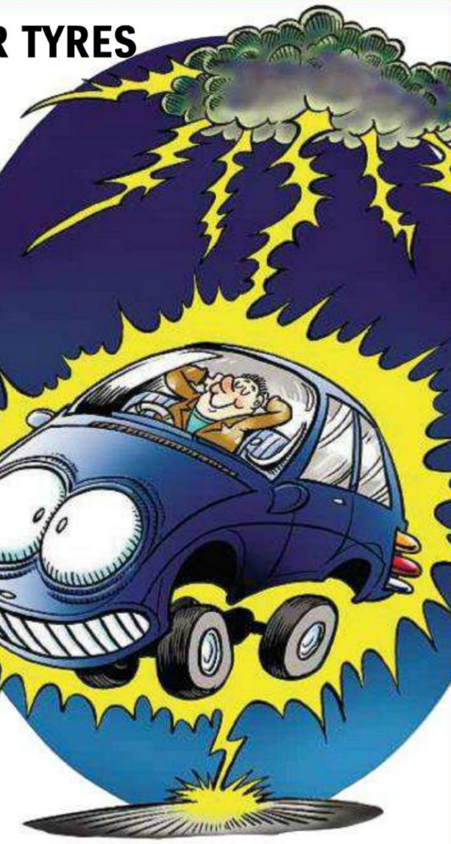
Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

154. RUBBER TYRES

The myth

During a lightning storm, you're safe inside a car, because the rubber tyres insulate you from the electricity.



HUNT EMERSON

The "truth"

A car, or other vehicle, can indeed be a pretty good place to sit out lightning – provided you avoid touching anything metal in the vehicle – but it's got nothing whatsoever to do with the tyres. That small amount of rubber offers no deterrent at all to the enormous force of a lightning strike. Rather than non-conductive rubber, what's protecting you is the highly conductive metal from which the roof and sides of the vehicle are made. You're sitting (with your hands safely in your lap, experts advise) in what is essentially a Faraday Cage. Due to what's called the "skin effect", the lightning's current is for the most part carried by the outside of the conductive material – in this case, the metal frame of the car – safely into the ground, without passing through the people inside. It might jump from the bottom of the chassis to the ground, or it might just go straight through the useless tyres, blowing them apart in the process. A vehicle with a non-metal frame or roof, or no roof at all, won't help. Nor, of course, will the rubber tyres of a bicycle or motorbike.

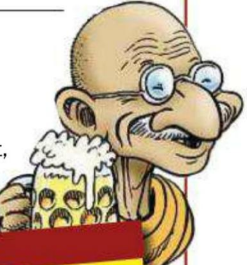
Sources

http://1.usa.gov/iKGuE8 (wrh.noaa.gov); http://bit.ly/He1v1i (earthgauge.net); http://bit.ly/H8gAXQ (weatherimagery.com); http://bit.ly/13vu7m (lightningsafety.com).

Disclaimer

Scientific terms are used here purely in the interests of making the author look as if he knows what he's talking about. He doesn't. Therefore, corrections and disputations from people who do are always welcomed by the editor of *FT*'s letters page.

Mythchaser



Can any reader give a firm ruling on this controversy: did Mohandas Gandhi drink his own urine – for reasons of religion, asceticism, health, or anything else? In the West, it's the one thing everybody knows about him; in India, however, the story is widely pooh-poohed.

FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:

www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

WorldMags.net

ANIMAL VETERANS

The world's longest-lived cat, dogs, horses, donkeys, sheep, wild swan, tern and goldfish.

WALES NEWS SERVICE

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / YOMIURI SHIMBUN

- A 39-year-old tabby cat called Lucy (right) was probably the oldest known cat in the world in 2011. She was living with Bill Thomas, 63, a town counsellor in Llanelli, South Wales – and could well be still alive, since there has been no news of her passing. Mr Thomas inherited her when his wife's godmother, Maria Lewis, died in 1999. He didn't realise how old she was until his wife's aunt came to visit. "She could remember Lucy scampering around Maria's fish and chip shop when she was a kitten back in 1972," he said. The aunt remembered Lucy from working at the shop in 1973, when Lucy was three years old. Others have confirmed seeing her in the shop in the early Seventies; this makes Lucy's estimated year of birth as 1971 or 1972. "She's gone deaf but apart from that she's in good shape and still likes to patrol the garden every day looking for mice," said Mr Thomas. "Most of the time she lies in her basket and has a sleep. She's a bit stiff but she gets up for her food." The only other cat that came close to her age was Creme Puff, a Texas cat who died aged 38 years and three days. *Metro, 6 Jan; Care2.com, 21 Feb 2011.*

- Runners-up in the feline longevity tables include: Miez Maz, put to sleep at the age of 33 when a vet mistook him for a sick stray after he escaped from his home in Tagerwilen, Switzerland, in February 2012; Mischief of Launceston, Cornwall, who died aged 30 in June 2011; James of Blackburn, Lancashire, who turned 27 in January 2011; Lewis of Plymouth (a female despite her name) and Susie of Kettering, Northamptonshire, both of whom were 25 in December 2010; and Blackie from Thurnby, Leicestershire, who was 24 in January 2011. *Sun, 11+15 Dec; D.Mail, 11+21 Dec; D.Mirror, 17 Dec 2010; D.Telegraph, 9 June 2011; Metro, 14 Feb 2012.*

- The world's oldest dog according to Guinness World Records died on 5 December 2011, aged 26 years and eight months. Pusuke (below), a fluffy tan Shiba mix, was born 1 April 1985, and would have been the equivalent of about 125 years old for a human. He had suddenly fallen ill and refused to eat anything, his owner Yumiko Shinohara said at her home in Sakura, a city outside Tokyo. The all-time canine record for longevity is held by an Australian cattle dog called Bluey, who died in 1939 aged 29 years and five months. *Shropshire Star, 8 Dec; Metro, Independent, 9 Dec 2011.*

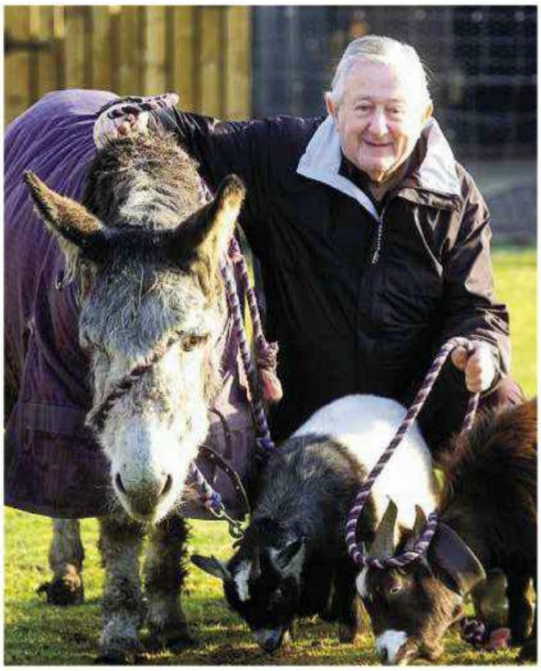
- Another dog may have trumped Pusuke. Bonny, a Yorkshire terrier, belonged to Vic and Kath Aveyard from Leeds for 25 years, and was about three when they got her, making her 28 in January 2011, when they obtained Bonny's case notes from the PDSA to establish her exact age; our source (*D.Mirror, 3 Jan 2011*) gives no more details.

- Runners-up in the canine longevity tables include: Uncle Chichi from New York City, between 24 and 26 in January 2012; Sheba, a sheepdog-Alsatian cross from Wines, Cheshire, 25 in November 2010; Pip, a terrier-whippet cross from Brentwood, Essex, 24-and-a-half in December 2011; Luby Lou, a Bedlington Terrier-cross from Market Drayton, 23 in September 2010; and Billy, a Yorkshire terrier from Halifax, 22 in September 2010. *D.Mail, Metro, 23 Sept 2010, 16 Dec 2011; Shropshire Star, 29 Sept 2010; Sun, 2 Nov 2010; Eastern Daily Press, 26 Jan 2012.*

- Shayne, a chestnut stallion at the Remus Memorial Horse sanctuary in Brentwood, Essex, is 51 years old and could well be the oldest horse in the world. "He has a little touch of arthritis, but other than that he is as fit as a fiddle," said founder Sue Barton. He spends up to five hours a day in the fresh air, where he mixes with the 76 other horses cared for by the charity. His longevity is attributed to being ridden only occasionally. Before he moved to the sanctuary in 2007, the thoroughbred Irish Draught had lived with a family in nearby Chingford since the early 1960s. Although the oldest horse ever recorded was 62, most rarely live beyond their 20s. Guinness World Records have not received a claim for the oldest living horse since the death of Badger, an Arab-Welsh cross from Pembrokeshire who died aged 51 in 2004. *D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 1 Mar 2012.*

- In January 2011, a donkey called Eeyore (facing, top) celebrated his 54th birthday, making him the oldest donkey in the world. Owner Selwyn Demmy, who runs the Hunter's Moon shelter in Mottram St Andrew, Cheshire, reckons that Eeyore could be even older, but has no way of verifying it. "The last owners had him for 10 years and the previous owners had him for 40," he said, "and we think that Eeyore was a few years old when they got him." The current holder of the Guinness World Record is Suzy, a US donkey who died aged 54 in

2002. A Blackpool donkey is thought to have hit 64, but this has not been proven. *Metro, 14 Jan; D.Mail, 25 Jan 2011.*

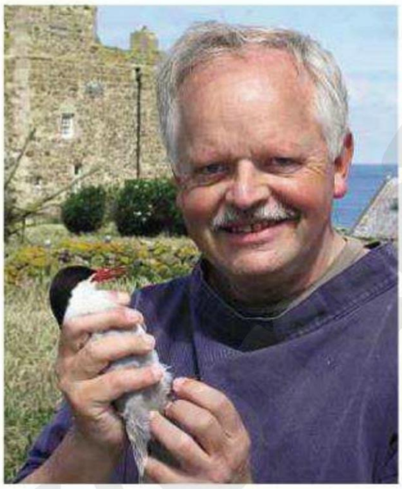

MEN MEDIA

• A sheep thought to be the world's oldest died after falling over a 150ft (46m) cliff on Lewis in the Western Isles. The blackface ewe – variously nicknamed Twiggy or Methuselina – was a month short of her 26th birthday. Crofter John Maciver, 51, attributed her longevity to her still having most of her teeth, allowing her to graze easily, and her "independent spirit". Most sheep do not live longer than 12 years. The last recognised holder of the world's oldest sheep title, Lucky, died in Australia in 2009, aged 23. *D.Mail, Independent, 29 Feb 2012.*

• Britain's oldest wild swan, Rambo, died last December aged 30. The mute swan was named after the action film character because of his ferocious temper. According to local legend, he not only made a daily habit of chasing Canada geese from his territory, but had killed swans and even two small dogs that came too close to his nest, in Queen's Park, Blackburn, Lancashire. He was tagged at the park with a swan ring by the RSPB's international project in 1988, when he was already a mature adult. *D.Mail, 23 Dec 2011.*

• Britain's oldest Arctic tern, officially known as CE60645 (right), passed the age of 30 in 2010. It was ringed on 28 June 1980, a few days after its birth on the Farne Islands in Northumbria. It had clocked up over a million miles of flight, as its migration from Britain to Antarctica is one of the longest of any species. By travelling in an 'S' shape, the birds can cover more than 44,000 miles (71,000km) a year. The previous record age for a tern in the UK was 29; the normal life span is 15 years. A Manx shearwater, ringed in North Wales, was 55 years old when it was recaptured in 2008. *D.Telegraph, 21 Sept; D.Mail, 22 Sept 2010.*

• Two goldfish called Splish and Splash, aged 34, are thought to be Britain's oldest. They belong to Richard and Ann Wright of Brockworth, Gloucestershire, whose children brought them home from a fair in 1977. The normal goldfish lifespan is 10 years, but fairground fish usually died long before that. The world's oldest recorded goldfish died in 2005 aged 43. *Sun, 1 Dec 2011.*


NATIONAL TRUST

KONSPIRACY KORNER

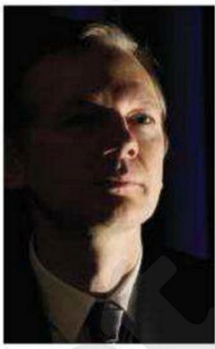
ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE MAN BEHIND WIKILEAKS

Who'd be Julian Assange? He's gone from being portrayed as the avatar of a new digital-savvy citizenry who would fight the evil empires of unaccountable political power to being seen as a kind of buffoon. In 2009, Amnesty International awarded Assange its International Media Award. This year, the Secret Policeman's Ball, staged in support of Amnesty, included a sketch mocking him.

Inevitably, Assange is in the sights of some of the Net's conspiracy theorists. Some of the Jew-haters look at the fact that he won *The Economist* New Media Award in 2008 and conclude that he's working for the Rothschilds (who own some of the shares in *The Economist*, though how many isn't a matter of record).

There are claims that Assange had agreed not to embarrass Israel, or was even working for Israel, in the 2010 release of the US State Department cables which started the furore. The allegations, mainly from Arab sources, have been around for over a year and as yet nothing of substance has appeared to back them up.[1]


GETTY IMAGES / AFP / LEON NEAL

Even the *New Statesman* has joined in the 'Get Assange' campaign, with a bizarre smear job. Using the standard guilt-by-association technique – Assange knows X, and X thinks Y, so Assange is guilty of what Y thinks – the article hinges on a claim that "Israel Shamir, a WikiLeaks associate and an intimate friend of Julian Assange... *allegedly* travelled to Belarus with a cache of unredacted American diplomatic cables concerning the country."[2] A couple of thousand words then follow trying to link Assange to the dictatorial regime in Belarus, all built on that "allegedly". In the rush to denigrate Assange, the usual *New Statesman* editorial standards seem to have melted away.

Back on the Anglo-American conspirasphere's main street, Webster Tarpley, a one-time member of Lyndon LaRouche's organisation of global conspiracy theorists, has suggested that Assange is an "MK-Ultra zombie".[3] Did the CIA's MK-Ultra programmes ever produce a 'zombie' of any kind? Not as far as the available evidence shows. But never mind: LaRouchians do not need the prosaic stuff we lesser beings call evidence and Tarpley offers none about Assange.

Most bizarre of all, Gordon Duff, a senior editor at the American magazine *Veterans Today*, mixes and matches theories, with Assange the "secret protégé of Rupert Murdoch", and Wikileaks "at best, Israeli propaganda and, at worst, a Mossad psy-op".[4] In Duff's mind (if nowhere else) these two claims are connected by the fact that Rupert Murdoch is, apparently, Jewish.[5]

Veterans Today generally, and the writing of former Marine and banker Duff, in particular, are interesting sources of conspiracy theories. Where are they politically? That question is irrelevant. Like the LaRouchians, Duff's all-seeing conspiratorial eye is not constrained by political allegiances. He recently wrote off John Pilger as "another Murdoch asset" and described a speech of Pilger's on Youtube as showing him "peddling war on Iran".[6] Both claims are so far off target as to make me wonder which planet Duff is on (or from).

NOTES

1 See for example http://bit.ly/GJ3kXT (indybay.org).

2 http://bit.ly/ADdbvW (newstatesman.com).

3 Tarpley says this on the Alex Jones radio show. http://bit.ly/GIHi3E (YouTube). Go to 11.05.

4 http://bit.ly/GJlni3 (veteranstoday.com).

5 His mother was Jewish and this makes him technically a Jew as Judaism passes through the female side. In a speech in 2009, Murdoch raised the claim that he was Jewish and then declined to deny or confirm it. See http://bit.ly/ob8Zx (ajc.org).

6 http://bit.ly/npAspW (veteranstoday.com).

MATT PATTINSON

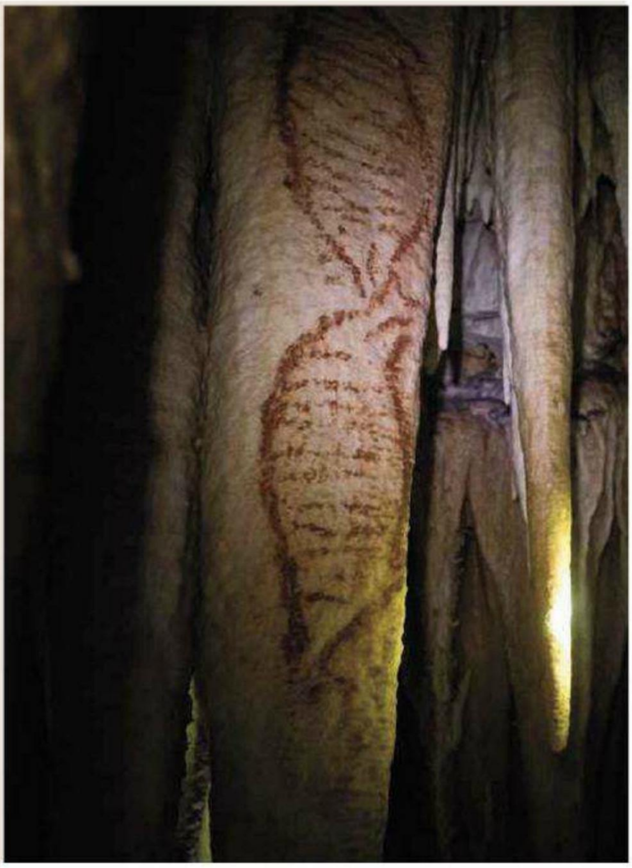
ARCHÆOLOGY

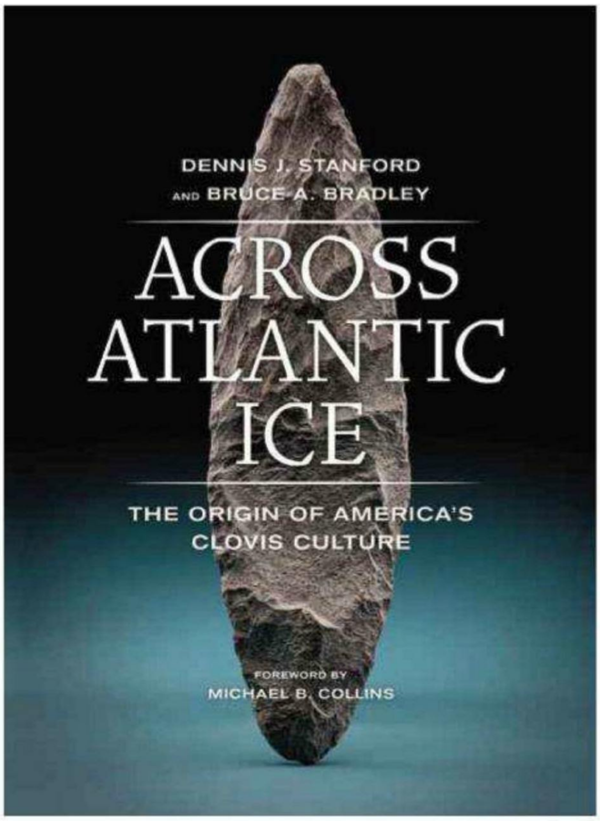
Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, a founding co-editor of the peer-review *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.bergpublishers.com).

CULTURE SHOCK

It was thought that art was first produced by modern humans during the Upper Palæolithic era – an example being the remarkable rock paintings in the Chauvet cave in France – featured in Werner Herzog's film *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* – which date to 25,000–32,000 years BC. Although we still don't really know what the activity we call "art" actually is, we have considered it to be a unique indicator of advanced human culture. But along come some new dating tests that challenge that assumption. Charcoal markings associated with a series of paintings of seals inside the Nerja cave near Malaga in Spain have been dated to c.43,000 years ago.

It is not merely that according to these data these images are at or earlier than the older end of the Upper Palæolithic era, and before representational painted images are thought to have appeared, but that the available evidence indicates they were produced by Neanderthals, the supposedly more primitive and brutish strain of human beings who long preceded modern humans, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, in Europe and overlapped briefly with them before mysteriously disappearing or dying out. It is thought that this cave on the southern coast of Spain was one of the last places in Europe where Neanderthals sought refuge from the incoming waves of modern humanity – there is apparently no evidence of modern human presence there contemporary with the Neanderthals. The existence of these seemingly pre-modern human artworks is "mindblowing", says one of the University of Cordoba researchers involved, who states that it could revolutionise our understanding of culture and evolution. *Gizmodo, 7 Feb; Mail on Sunday, 12 Feb 2012.*


GETTY IMAGES / AFP / JORGE GUERRERO



ABOVE: Dennis Stanford and Bruce Bradley's new book.

CAVEMEN AND NOT COLUMBUS

In a new book, *Across Atlantic Ice*, archæologists Dennis Stanford of the Smithsonian Institution in the US, and Bruce Bradley of the University of Exeter in the UK, present evidence that North America was first encountered by Stone Age people from the Iberian peninsula and France travelling west following the southern edge of the frozen ice sheet in the North Atlantic during the Ice Age, a margin that would have been rich in food resources like migrating seals, sea birds, and fish, long before the Siberian ancestors of the American Indians and, of course, many ages ahead of Columbus.

The main evidence consists of the analysis of dozens of stone tools, between 19,000 and 26,000 years old, discovered at locations along the east coast of the USA in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and also off the Virginian coast on what in prehistoric times would have been dry land. These tools are pretty much identical to Stone Age western European ones, and seemingly contemporaneous with them. Moreover, geochemical analysis carried out in 2011 on a European-style stone knife uncovered in Virginia in 1971 showed that it was made of flint originating in France. Further research, some of it subterranean off the US east coast, is planned this year in order to uncover more Stone Age artefacts.

There is also genetic evidence to support the archæologists' theory: 8,000-year-old skeletons found in Florida have yielded DNA traces indicative of a European origin, and there is a minor smattering of genetic markers across some Amerindian peoples that cannot have come from Siberian populations. There is even some linguistic evidence in that a small number of isolated Native American groups have languages quite unlike those used by Asian-originating American Indians. Although this book is new, and the reports about it are in current newspapers, your columnist humbly points out that advance notice of the earlier part of the research did appear in his *Mysterious Ancient*

America (pp32–35) in 2002. *Independent, D.Telegraph, 28 Feb; Washington Post, 29 Feb 2012.*

BLUE-EYED ANCESTOR

Ruminations about the origin of blue eyes crop up periodically. Recent reports in the popular press tell of research by a team from Copenhagen University indicating that blue eye colouring stems from a single genetic mutation of an individual who lived around the northwestern edge of the Black Sea c.8,000 years ago. The researchers studied 155 members of three generations of a large Danish family, as well as five blue-eyed, light-skinned individuals from Turkey and two blue-eyed, dark-skinned persons from Jordan. If you want to know, the finding relates to an element in gene HERC2, apparently, that inhibits OCA2, which normally promotes the biological process that produces brown melanin pigment. Originally, you see, our ancestors were all brown-eyed. *USA Today, 27 Feb 2012*, but citing a source in *Human Genetics* dated 2008!

ONLINE ARCHÆOLOGY

For those of you who like to do your archæology in an armchair (or an office chair), here are some online resources to be aware of.

For an effortless, computer-generated fly-through of ancient Rome (c.AD 320), with superb 3D modelled graphics and some animations, go to http://vimeo.com/32038695. For an archæological feast concerning Stonehenge and its environs, go to http://bit.ly/HrFGiq (blogs.bournemouth.ac.uk) to download 'Google-under-the-Earth' software (Google Earth needs to be pre-loaded on your computer), developed as part of the multi-university Stonehenge Riverside Project to add layers of archæological data to the Stonehenge landscape. It is an exciting interactive presentation of a mass of information, but takes a little while to learn to navigate. Finally, the website for the Royal College of Art's multi-sensory 'Landscape and Perception Project (www.landscape-perception.com), with which this columnist and colleague Jon Wozencroft are closely associated, has been hugely updated with much additional content material – hear the lithophones, see the sightlines, and read all about the source area of the Stonehenge bluestones, the Carn Menyn ridge in Preseli, south-west Wales, and surrounding landscape, with a sideways look at Avebury in Wiltshire.

CLASSICAL CORNER

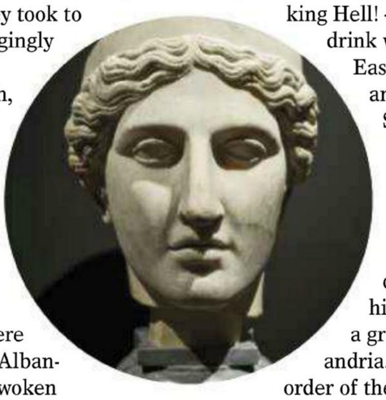
FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

150. HIGH OLD TIMES

'Bling', *Sex and the City* fashionistas, conspicuous affluence – You name it, the ancients can match it.

Sybaris, a Greek colony in Southern Italy, was *the* classical byword for high living, hence our 'sybarite'. Athenæus (*Deipnosophists*, bk12 paras518C–521F – the whole book is devoted to Greek luxury), having excoriated Etruscan extravagances, is the chief source. Binge drinking (good for their health, the Sybarites insisted) and foppish clothes were their chief preoccupations, rather than sex, unlike the Etruscans and other 'decadent' societies. Their brightly coloured attire resulted from close trading links with Miletus, itself famous (pre-Socratic philosophers apart) for inventing purple dye, double beds, and dildos.

Logically enough for their booze culture, the Sybarites are credited with inventing the chamber-pot, which they took to parties. Whether they braggingly compared brand names is unknown. There are, though, many ancient mentions of flying commodes when the potations got too deep.



GETTY IMAGES / AFP / RONALDO SCHEMIDT

Naturally enough, these topers prized their sleep-ins. To ensure quiet, all noise-producing trades (blacksmiths, etc.) were banned from the city, as were roosters – I once read that Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha, woken early by a dog, ordered the massacre of all Tirana canines – a nasty bit of doggy dogma from this ardent ideologue. Such expedients were necessary, if the Sybarite rendered sleepless by a crumpled rose petal in his bedding was typical – talk about the fairytale Princess and the Pea. Still, you couldn't be too careful: the Byzantine general Solomon was as an infant accidentally castrated by his blankets (Procopius, *Wars*, bk3 ch11 para6) – a right balls-up.

Despite its fabled hedonism, Sybaris also managed to acquire dominion over 25 neighbouring cities, supposedly mustering an army of 300,000 citizens, a figure about as credible as Heorodotus's (*Histories*, bk7 ch188) 5,283,320 Persians. Eventually, they were hoist with their own meretricious petard. The Sybarites trained their horses to dance to pipe (not piped) music for dinner-party entertainment. Knowing this, their neighbouring enemy Crotoniates, when attacked, had their pipers strike up the familiar music, thus enticing the Sybarite equines to dance over to the other side and so lose a key battle.

Presumably, Sybaris had to keep its war-horses away from the eponymous river, whose water, if drunk, made the creatures shy (pseudo-Aristotle, *Mirabilia*, para169; Strabo, *Geography*, bk6 para163). As with Sodom and Gomorrah, this Greek hyper-Eden was foredoomed. Its actual destruction was presaged by all the city officials simultaneously dreaming that the goddess Hera (below) appeared vomiting in the city centre, a vision postluded by her temple's fountain gushing blood.

The victorious Crotoniates flooded Sybaris's ruins by diverting the river Carthis, to bury it for eternity. For its modern rediscovery, using the then novel proton-magnotometer, see Orville H Bullitt, *Search for Sybaris* (JB Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1969).

The early Roman Republic attempted to impose virtuous plain living by (e.g.) sumptuary laws limiting personal adornment – Blingking Hell! – and forbidding women to drink wine. But, when West met East in the shape of Antony and Cleopatra, their private Sybaris Redivivus-cum-Xanadu hit the headlines, and not just for her famous barge-ride immortalised by Shakespeare.

Plutarch (*Antony*, chs26–29) is our reporter, his information partly from a grandfather resident in Alexandria. Booze and nosh were the order of the day. Antony had such a sottish reputation that he issued a would-be rebutting pamphlet *On His Own Drunkeness* – lost, alas. On a typical evening, due to the hosts' whimsical changes of plan, separate meals involving (e.g.) eight roast boars for a dozen guests were constantly re-cooked "to catch the right moment".

All this was done under the name The Society of Inimitable Livers. Or was it Lovers? A statue base found in Alexandria salutes Antony by this title. Cleopatra supposedly served up lashings of sex. One popular claim was that she fellated 100 men in a night, a tale perhaps influenced by Plutarch's mention of her large mouth.

Moderns – such is the way of classical scholars – argue over the truth of Antony's tinkling in a golden chamber-pot; cf. Joyce Tyldesley: *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt* (Basic Books, NY, & Profile Books, London, 2009), dissected (*New York Review of Books*, 9 Feb 2009). Such double-golden showers are attested for the royal wee of the scandalous teenage Roman emperor Elagabalus (**FT251:21**), also lesser Roman mortals (Martial, *Epigrams*, bk1 no.37).

WorldMags.net

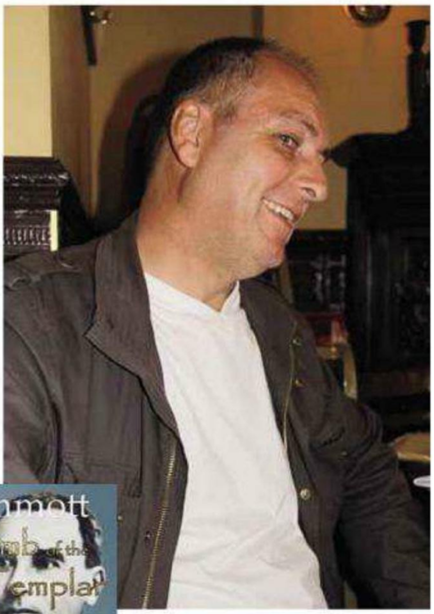
Rennes-le-Château hoax

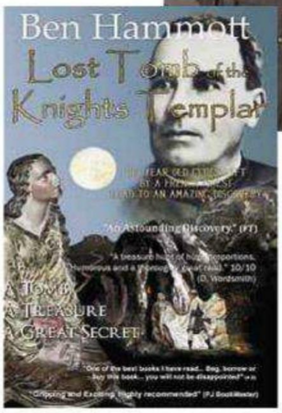
Book on a Templar tomb is revealed to be fiction, and by a known faker

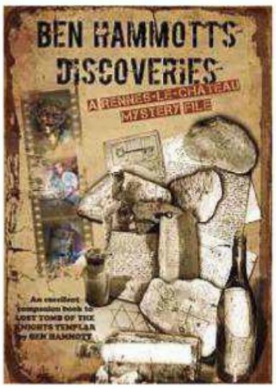
One of the most contentious recent claims about Rennes-le-Château has been exposed as a hoax – and its perpetrator turns out to have a track record.

Over 10 years ago, Bill Wilkinson, under the name The Tombman, started promoting photographs of a cave-tomb he said he'd discovered near the Pyrenean village. They showed a body under a shroud, with a chest, a book, chalices and coins scattered around. Adopting the name Ben Hammott, an anagram of The Tombman, Wilkinson wrote a book about his discoveries: *Lost Tomb of the Knights Templar* [reviewed **FT247:61**]

In 2008, film-makers Bruce Burgess and René Barnett released *Bloodline – the Movie*, an investigation into the Priory of Sion. As well as interviews with the usual suspects, the film showed Wilkinson and others following clues they'd taken from paintings and statues in the church at Rennes-le-Château, which supposedly pointed to the location of Abbé Bérenger Saunière's great secret. They were filmed digging up several old bottles with messages written in red ink by Saunière, and a small wooden box containing a first-century oil jar, a glass vial containing another document and some coins. They had these certified at the British Museum.


ANDREW GOUGH


Ben Hammott
Lost Tomb of the Knights Templar
"An Astounding Discovery." (FT)
A Tomb
A Treasure
A Great Secret
"Gripping and Exciting. Highly recommended" (PJ BookWeaver)


BEN HAMMOTTS DISCOVERIES
A RENNES-LE-CHATEAU MYSTERY FILE
An excellent companion book to LOST TOMB OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR by BEN HAMMOTT

LEFT: Bill Wilkinson / Ben Hammott / The Tombman. **BELOW:** Books on the supposed discoveries.

In *Bloodline*, Wilkinson lowered a camera through a hole into the cave to film the body. The shroud showed a red cross, which meant it must be a Crusader banner – but could they have been venerating someone much older? Could it have been the body of Mary Magdalene, who was believed to have come to this area after the crucifixion of Jesus, with their child or children? (This was at the height of the *Da Vinci Code* hysteria, when every wild idea about the Magdalene was given credence.)

Critics immediately pointed out numerous holes in Wilkinson's claims, one simple one being that the Templar banner was a black and white design; the red cross was only on their mantles. He was criticised for his amateur treasure-hunting, for deliberate trespassing, for removing artefacts from their context, for damaging a potentially important archæological site and for not passing the information to French archæologists who could do a professional excavation. Few believed the messages in bottles were genuine.

However, Wilkinson stuck to his story. On his website, he wrote: "My hope is that one day after the Tomb has been officially excavated, all of the Artifacts will be on display in a museum, and if there is a little card by them saying, *'Discovered by Ben Hammott'* that would really be something I could be proud of."

In mid-March 2012, researcher Andrew Gough revealed on his Arcadia forum that the whole thing was a fraud. Gough gave the text of Wilkinson's confession: "Everything I said I discovered is a hoax, planted by me and only me."

The photographs and film of the "tomb" near Rennes-le-Château were actually taken in a warehouse in England, Wilkinson told René Barnett in an online interview a few days later. Initially, he used a small tabletop model, with a 6in (15cm) skeleton on a plinth. But when he realised he would have to come up with more for the *Bloodline* film, he bought a full-sized plastic skeleton, draped it in a cloth and laid it on a wooden plinth painted to look like marble. The artefacts scattered around the tomb and the vials and messages were also just props, either bought online or created by Wilkinson.

"It just escalated and snowballed when I got involved in the *Bloodline* film," he told Barnett. "It just became part of my life. Sometimes I believed it was real and I'd get excited about it, and then I'd remember it wasn't. I just kept living the lie and carrying on, to see where it would go."

Wilkinson still believes there is something out there, and intends to keep searching.

"I always knew that it would come out eventually… This is why I was trying to find something real. But if I'd found a real tomb with a real body in it I'd say: 'Look, the last one was just made up but it doesn't matter because we've found the real one now.' Surely that would have been better than the situation we are in now, with nothing."

Gough also revealed that this wasn't Wilkinson's first attempt at a hoax. In 1999, he presented a film of the Loch Ness monster to a team of specialists hoping they would validate it, but they rejected it as "a well constructed hoax". Wilkinson owned up to his Rennes-le-Château deception when Gough exposed his latest scheme, photographs of a fake Ark of the Covenant he was hoping to sell.

While some Rennes aficionados are questioning the legality of Wilkinson's actions, others have begun a new conspiracy theory, claiming that his confession is the real hoax.

David V Barrett

SOURCES

http://bit.ly/GHMrJE (andrewgough.co.uk).
http://www.latalkradio.com/Rene.php
http://www.benhammott.com

A^Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden, including some previously unknown salamanders and a type of horse fly named after a pop star and her backside.

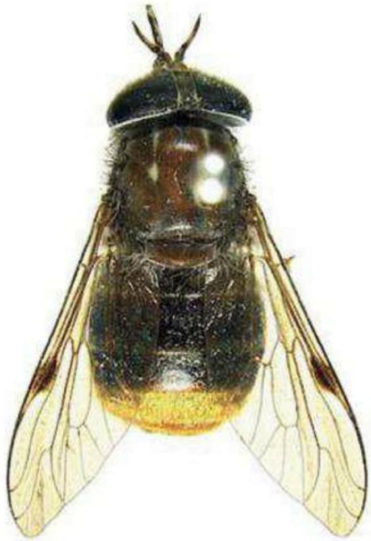
A BRUTE OF A NEWT

In response to my blog post of 13 February 2012 surveying reports of giant mystery salamanders reported from North America, I was delighted to receive an email containing the following previously undocumented sighting of just such a creature. In deference to his wishes, I shall refer to the eyewitness merely as Tom. This is how he described his very interesting sighting:

"It was a long time ago. I was eight or nine so it must have been late Fifties or early Sixties. It was a sunny, clear afternoon. I was riding a bike with my cousin somewhere along cranberry bogs in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. I don't remember which town. I saw an approximately 3ft [90cm] long (or perhaps even larger) brown salamander-like creature emerge from a bog, swiftly but not in a panic, cross the path we were riding on, and disappear splashing onto the other side into the bog there. I was very interested in wildlife even then and was familiar with the common black and yellow salamanders we have everywhere in New England. This had their general morphology but was much larger and browner. It looked very similar to the giant Chinese salamanders in your picture. Not sure if it could have been a hellbender but I don't think those are native to New England? And this was bigger. Well, not too exciting, but exotic enough for me to have remembered it vividly to this day."

The hellbender *Cryptobranchus alleganiensis* is the only known species of giant salamander native to North America. Up to 29in (74cm) long, it is brown or brownish-red in colour, and resembles the larger Chinese and Japanese giant salamanders. Judging from Tom's description, I think it likely that what he saw was a large hellbender, but making it potentially significant is that although this species has been recorded from a number of eastern US states, Massachusetts is not one of them. Consequently, this suggests either that there is (or was) an undocumented hellbender population there or that Tom's specimen was a lone straggler that had wandered eastwards well beyond the limits of its species's scientifically verified distribution range. My thanks to Tom for kindly permitting me to record his sighting here. *Tom, pers. comm., 16 Feb 2012; http://bit.ly/Hb0kAN (karlshuker.blogspot.co.uk) 13 Feb 2012.*

GREG LIPPS



ABOVE: The hellbender salamander. **LEFT:** The horsefly named as *Scaptia* (*Plinthina*) *beyonceæ*.

BELOW: Beyoncé and her golden posterior.

SEEKING THE SIREN OF IRAN

Coincidentally, little over a fortnight before Tom's account had reached me, I'd received a report of a very different but equally intriguing mystery salamander, this time from Facebook friend Marie Sharay (not her real name). At the age of 10, after having lived in a wildlife-rich region on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada, where the mudpuppies and other salamanders were familiar to her, she moved with her family to a location on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea just outside Bandar Pahlavi in Iran. And it was there she saw the following still unidentified water creature, swimming up a ditch within a very large area of swampland known as Annzali lagoon:

"[It] looked like a very dark snake with large frills behind its head. I remember it vividly. It was probably about a foot in length and the head was more mudpuppy-shaped than snake-shaped. I've always wanted to know what it was, and after intermittent searching over the years, the only things I can find that look very similar are these [she included a link to an online page on the lesser siren *Siren intermedia*]. But they apparently don't live anywhere near the Middle East. So, what the heck did I see swimming up that ditch?"

Good question. For although Iran is home to a number of salamander species, and although the creature spied by Marie definitely seems to have been a salamander, none of Iran's known species even faintly resembles it. It does, however, recall the lesser siren. Sirens constitute three species of highly specialised aquatic salamander characterised by their long eel-like bodies, conspicuous external gills, tiny vestigial forelimbs, and absence of hindlimbs. However, sirens are found only in the USA and Mexico, so if Marie saw a siren in Iran, it was either an escaped pet or an unknown Middle East representative. Marie discounts the pet possibility, stating that the local people lived very basic lives and didn't keep pets. So what we have left is the exciting prospect of an undescribed species of siren-like aquatic salamander. Consequently, if any *FT* reader has knowledge of the amphibians of Iran and could shed light on this intriguing mystery beast, we'd love to hear from you. *Marie Sharay, pers. comm., 28 Jan 2012.*

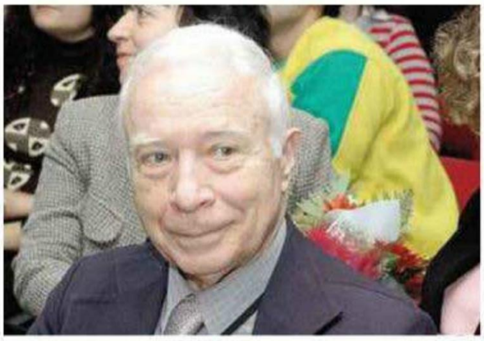
A BOOTYLICIOUS DISCOVERY!

Naming a new species after a celebrity is hardly unknown (**FT198:8**), but in the case of the following new insect, native to the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland, Australia, there is a much more visible reason for bestowing such an honour. The insect in question is a new species of horse fly, which its discoverer, Bryan Lessard of Australia's CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation), has formally dubbed *Scaptia* (*Plinthina*) *beyonceæ*, after Beyoncé Knowles – formerly lead singer of Destiny's Child but nowadays a solo megastar diva. And the reason for naming this fly after her? Not only had it been present but hitherto unstudied in a fly collection since 1981, the year of Beyoncé's birth, but its most distinctive feature is a prominent golden posterior! *(Wolverhampton) Express and Star, 17 Jan 2012.*

FREDERICK M BROWN / GETTY IMAGES

NECROLOG

We note the passing of a Romanian writer, editor and publisher of science fiction and ufology, plus “one of the great American ufologists” and a Canadian fortean researcher.



ION HOBANA

Ion Hobana (above) was widely respected in Romania as “a pioneer” of “the literature of anticipation” – what we’d call science fiction (SF). He also worked in television and, in 1974, staged a theatrical version of HG Wells’s *The Invisible Man* in Bucharest. His stories have been translated into more than 20 languages.

Hobana was born in Sannicolau Mare, near Timisoara, and studied at the University of Bucharest, where his 1958 graduation thesis was a study of science fiction as social literature. From 1954 until late 2010, he published collections of poetry, novels, introductions for classic novels, and several books on UFOs in Eastern Europe, sometimes using the pseudonyms ‘John Hoban’ and ‘Aurelian Manta Roşie’ (‘Aurelian Red Jacket’ which, curiously, many entries on the Internet have declared was his real name. He would have liked that).

His parents – his father Sorin Hobana was a sports announcer and his mother a teacher – were both lovers of European literature, and young Ion was encouraged to read their collection of Romanian and French poets and novelists. Later he “spent many hours” in the National Library at Barlad, where he discovered the splendid Hetzel editions of Jules Verne novels. He also played the violin and, towards the end of his life, “thanks to the Internet” thoroughly enjoyed fantasy gaming with online enthusiasts “everywhere”.

He began writing SF in 1955 and worked as an editor, translator, and historian, and was a member of several writers’ and cultural societies. For many years, he served the Writers Union as General Secretary and, in 1973, was awarded a Grand Prize from the Polish Ministry of Culture and Art for his life-long promotion of literature, especially encouraging young writers and readers. He also won genre awards for his fantasy and science fiction writing in 1980 and 1984. His youthful passion for the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne and HG Wells were later translated into scholarly studies of them and on French and Romanian SF generally. His last book, *A History of French Literature: Scientific Imagination from its Origins to 1900*, was published in November 2010.

His first book on UFOs – *OZN: o sfidare pentru raţiunea umană* (‘UFO: A Challenge to Human Reason’, written with Belgian Julien Weverbergh), was published in 1971. Its importance as the first comprehensive overview of ufology in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was immediately recognised and it was later translated into several languages, including English: *UFOs from behind The Iron Curtain* (1974). Spurred on by this success, Hobana and some close colleagues launched Romania’s first UFO study group, the Association for the Study of Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena, based in Bucharest. Their objective was to “establish a corpus of Romanian cases” and, to date, have amassed “a database of books, magazines, news clippings, reports, accompanied by photographs and videos”.

Looking back at that time (in an interview for the Romanian publisher Adevarul Cultura in February 2010), Hobana expressed amusement at the lack of obstacles and objections from Communist officials. He supposed that ‘ufology’ was probably tolerated because the regime thought it “posed no harm to the ideological imperatives of the time”. Furthermore, “it suited the regime to have students and the general public directing their attention to such innocuous topics”.

Two further books on UFOs cases in the USSR and Eastern Europe were written with Weverbergh and published in the Netherlands: *UFOs in Oost en West* (‘UFOs in East and West’, 1972) and *Triumful visătorilor* (‘The Dreamers’ Triumph’, 1991). His last word on the subject was *Enigme pe cerul istoriei* (‘Enigmas in the Sky from History’, 1993).

Just three months after his death, the Romanian Science Fiction & Fantasy Society established, in his memory, the annual ‘Ion Hobana Awards’ for the best new and young writers, sponsored by the Romanian Ministry of Culture.

Ion Hobana, Romanian writer, critic and ufologist, born Sânnicolau Mare, Romania, 25 Jan 1931; died from cancer in Bucharest, 22 Feb 2011, aged 80.

LUCIUS FARISH

Ufologist Antonio Huneeus affectionately describes Farish as “one of the great American ufologists, yet he never published a book, stopped writing articles years ago, never lectured and almost never appeared on TV.” One reason is that, before the advent of the Internet, Farish’s *UFO Newsclipping Service* – a 20-page monthly digest of photocopies of mainly American UFO-related reports, which included foreign articles, translations and forteana – was the best way for older generations of forteans and ufologists to keep informed. Founded by Rod Dyke in 1969, UFONS really took off when Farish joined him in 1977. Farish (left) became sole editor in 1991, retiring in 2007. UFONS ceased publication with issue 505 in August 2011.

Farish was a pioneer fortean who encouraged new talent and shared his unique archive of Arkansas anomaly research. Two such beneficiaries from the 1960s are the fortean historian Jerome Clark and cryptozoologist Loren Coleman, who both appreciated Farish’s encouragement and generosity. Coleman said that he was an archivist at heart, whose speciality was “researching 1890s airship cases”. Clark described him as “a courteous gentleman of the old school”.

Farish served in the state National Guard for 20 years and then worked for the US Postal Service until his retirement. Between 1989 and 2008, he organised the annual Ozark UFO Conference, one of the largest of American UFO events. He had no close family and left his estate, including 80 acres (32ha) of land, to a trust to be used to encourage UFO research and education through awards, fellowships and mini-grants.

Lucius O Farish, fortean and ufologist, born Plumerville, Arkansas, 27 April 1937; died from cancer Morrilton, Arkansas, 26 Jan 2012, aged 74.

W RITCHIE BENEDICT

Like his parents and many of his extended family, Benedict was born, educated, lived and died in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. He was an expert on Alberta’s history and acclaimed, by those who knew his work, as one of the best of the pre-Internet generation of fortean writers and researchers.

Benedict’s articles and reviews appeared in many periodicals and covered a wide spectrum of fortean topics, including ‘forbidden archæology’, mysterious inventors, Roswell, lake monsters, Bigfoot, man-eating plants, premonitions and survival of death. His account of seeing Ivan T Sanderson display the photo of a Thunderbird on a Canadian television show inspired one strand of the great search for this notoriously unfindable image; and also, from his own research, he believed that John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of Lincoln, somehow managed to fake his death and escape into obscurity.

Theo Paijmans, who corresponded with him for nearly two decades, described him as "a first class real-world researcher, thoroughly grounded in the resources of the analogue age. He knew his way amongst archives composed of imposing brick, dimmed lights, dusty rows and shelves and cellars instead of bytes, search engines and proper interfaces. He never went online and as far as I know didn't own a computer. He was one of those fortean legends only reachable by phone or better still, by good old fashioned letter."

Benedict's most valuable advice to fortean researchers is "always go back to the source". Indeed, he made this a rule for himself, spending years, as Paijmans notes, studying "reels of microfilm of Canadian newspapers that to this day remain undigitised and unseen by many a fortean eye." In a letter published in *Fate* in 1998, Benedict expressed a proper fortean sense of wonder at his discoveries: "When I started researching back issues of Canadian newspapers on microfilm I didn't expect to discover anything out of the ordinary. However, I found much more than I bargained for [..] which made the task both fascinating and addictive. There are literally hundreds of references to everything from ghosts to lake monsters to spontaneous combustion."

Some of this was made available to John Robert Colombo for his 1992 book *UFOs Over Canada: Personal Accounts Of Sightings and Close Encounters*, but there was "so much of a remarkable nature on all manner of phenomena", Benedict later told Paijmans, that "I am seriously contemplating assembling a book of my own in early 1994, tentatively entitled *Strange Tales From The Past*." Alas for us, the book never reached print and his manuscript was never discovered. He was, nevertheless, generous in sharing his research with others, as Paijmans readily acknowledges Benedict's contribution to his 1998 study *Free Energy Pioneer: John Worrell Keely*.

William Graham Ritchie Benedict, Canadian fortean writer and historian, born Calgary, Alberta, 8 Aug 1943; died Calgary 26 Sept 2011, aged 68.

FOR MORE STRANGE DEATHS GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/strangedeaths

Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A MAN DIED WHILE TRYING TO SET A RECORD for the longest time buried alive. Police said Janaka Basnayake, 24, buried himself at about 9.30am on 3 March 2012 with the help of family and friends in a 10ft (3m) trench sealed with wood and soil in the town of Kantale, 137 miles (220km) north of Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo. When he was brought to the surface at 4pm, after six and a half hours, he was unconscious. He was taken to hospital, where he was pronounced dead. A post mortem exam couldn't determine the cause of death and further medical investigations were being conducted. He had previously been buried for two and a half hours and six hours. His mother, LD Leelawathi, said her son had enjoyed performing unusual acts since his childhood – a liking that grew after watching movies. *[AP] 6 Mar 2012*.

ERICA MARSHALL, 28, WAS MONITORING A horse receiving oxygen therapy on 10 February when it became alarmed and kicked through the wall of the pressurised hyperbaric chamber, used to speed up injury recovery. Its steel horseshoe created a spark, causing a huge blast that threw debris 1,200ft (365m) and could be heard 30 miles (48km) away. Part of the roof and the side of the chamber was ripped off in the explosion, killing the horse and Mrs Marshall, who was watching it via a video link in a nearby room. Mrs Marshall, who married last November, had been running the chamber at the Kentucky Equine Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation Center in Ocala, Florida, for two years and had treated between two and six horses a day. Her last patient had not been tranquillised as it had been inside the chamber four times previously and had not reacted adversely. *D.Telegraph, Times, 14 Feb 2012*.

TERRY COLON

AN 18-YEAR-OLD UNIVERSITY STUDENT WAS killed in a car crash moments after posting a message on Facebook reading: "Driving and facebooking is not safe!" Taylor Sauer was driving from Utah State University to visit her parents in Idaho in January when she hit a slow-moving truck on a hill. Investigators discovered she had been sending and receiving texts and accessing Facebook an average of every 90 seconds during the journey. *D.Telegraph, 8 Mar 2012*.

A PRIZE bull that killed a farmer may have been spooked by an unfamiliar hat the man was wearing. Ian Rook, 58, wore his new red bobble hat instead of his usual flat cap in the bitter cold, and had not approached the field in his usual car. He suffered fatal chest injuries when the two-ton Aberdeen Angus threw him in the air and trampled him at his farm in Clanfield, Hampshire, in November 2010. Farm workers pulled the father of two away while the bull stood "snorting over the red hat". The bull, whose horns had been removed to reduce aggression, was destroyed. (The fact that Mr Rook's hat was red was probably of no consequence, since bulls can't see colour well.) *D.Mail, Metro, Sun, 16 Feb 2012*.

ARAZ SALEH, 23, DIED AFTER FALLING OFF A bucket of mayonnaise and stabbing himself in the heart with an electric drill. He had one foot on the industrial-sized bucket and one on a table while fixing metal panels to the side of a friend's fast food kiosk in Gloucester Green, Oxford, in November 2010. He lost his footing and as he fell his left shoulder hit a wall, driving the power tool into his chest. "Then I saw blood gushing out," said his friend, Salam Kiras. "It was an incredibly unusual injury," a policewoman told the inquest in Oxford. *dailymail.co.uk, D.Mirror, 9 Feb 2012*.

the UFO files

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FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

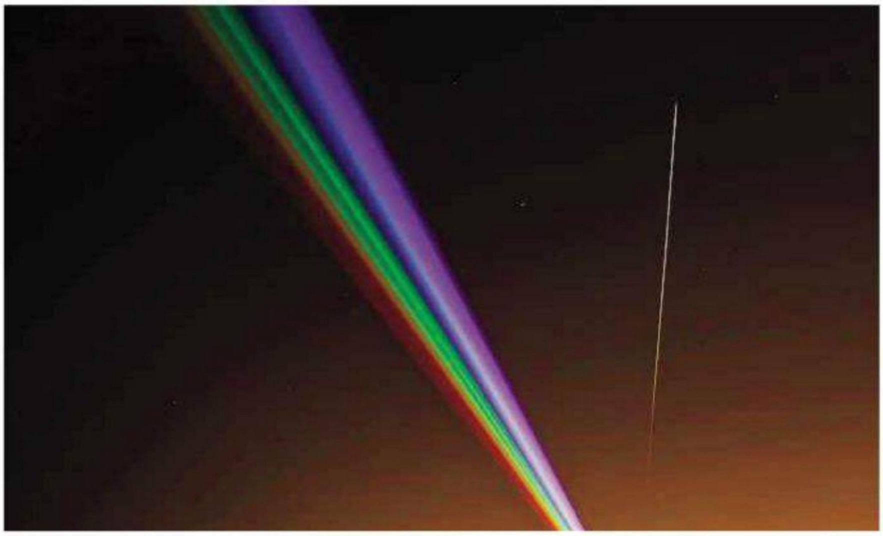
THE EXETER FACTOR

Considered by America's Aerial Phenomena Research Organisation to be "one of the best documented UFO accounts on record", the 1965 "Exeter Case" may finally have fallen to the keen blade of sceptical investigation. Between 12.30am and 3am on 3 September 1965, several people in the Exeter area of New Hampshire reported seeing bright lights. One witness claimed an object with flashing red lights had chased her. Another claimed "the thing" was as "large as a house" and sported a pulsating array of lights that always moved in the same 63-degree angle, at times being bright enough to light up the entire area. A policeman who drove this witness back to the site of his encounter also saw the lights and at one point "fell to the ground and started to draw [my] gun".

At the time, J Allen Hynek, then ufology's foremost scientific advocate, believed the case to be "a fine example of a Close Encounter of the First Kind", noting that the Pentagon was unable to explain it. Numerous explanations were seriously considered but fell by the wayside and the story has entered UFO lore as one of the great cases. In 1966, it became the subject of John G Fuller's book *Incident at Exeter* and has featured in numerous lists of 'best cases'. Now, 'skeptical' investigators Joe Nickell and James McGaha, who boast an impressive pedigree as astronomers and pilots, have concluded that the events in and around Exeter were most probably caused by aircraft re-fuelling, citing the angle and sequencing of the lights as being indicative of such an exercise. After examining the witnesses' testimony, they claim a USAF KC-97 refuelling plane was the culprit, the intensity, number, angle and sequencing of the lights being misperceived as a solid object. Unsurprisingly, UFO buffs have ridiculed McGaha and Nickell's claims, and a lengthy discussion can be found on the UFO Updates archive.

Like many classic cases, it is unlikely that the Exeter case will ever be fully resolved, due to the passage of time. But McGaha and Nickell's provocative cold case analysis has, once again, raised the importance of misperception as a fundamental mechanism in UFO experiences.

After years on the saucer beat, we remain convinced that misperception (a little name for a huge subject) lies at the root of ufology. *Skeptical Inquirer vol 35/6 (Nov–Dec 2011): http://bit.ly/y4CkOD (csicop.org); UFO Updates list: www.ufoupdateslist.com.*



NORTH NEWS & PICTURES / MIKE RIDLEY

HEAVENS ABOVE!

Hundreds of people reported seeing a fireball meteor that lit up the night sky across parts of northern England at 9.40pm on Saturday, 3 March. Police forces reported being inundated with calls reporting sightings from a zone stretching from Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, to the north of Scotland. The fireball was captured on a webcam at Whitley Bay (above) and was also spotted by astronomers including Adrian West, who believes it may have gone down in the English Channel or the Bay of Biscay. But Adam Hepworth, from Argyll, told the BBC: "At first I thought it was a sky lantern but then I realised it couldn't have been due to the speed that it was moving. I then thought perhaps it is a plane that had caught fire." Perceptive readers will recognise this description from UFO scares such as the Rendlesham incident (**FT204:33–39**) and the Cosford case (**FT199:30–31**). In both cases, the initial 'sightings' were sparked by fireballs and space junk respectively. The March fireball was visible for more than 30 seconds, a duration which in the past has often led people to believe they are seeing an aircraft in flames, a distress flare or, in other cases, a flying saucer. The Doomsday prophecies for 2012 also featured in some sighting accounts. The *Guardian*, for instance, reported that the director of the Kielder Observatory, Gary Fildes, was with a group of 30–40 sky-gazers who were overcome with excitement when the fireball appeared. "We got an incredible view," he said. "It was phenomenal. I was getting questions about what it is and is it going to end life on Earth? It was massively exciting." *BBC News Online, 4 Mar; Guardian, 5 Mar 2011.*

SIBERIAN SAUCER?

On 18 March, a large object (described on the fortean size scale as being "the size of a Volkswagen Beetle") was discovered in the wilds of Siberia near the village of Otradnesnky. No one saw it land, or indeed knew exactly when it first appeared, but the immediate belief in the area was that it was part of a spacecraft. The mystery deepened when Roscosmos, Russia's space agency, denied it was anything to do with them. The cylindrical object, weighing around 200kg, was dragged to the village where, according to a report in the *Daily Telegraph*, it was immediately confiscated by the authorities. What little information has been made available suggests the object is partially composed of titanium and is not radioactive. A spokesman from NASA's orbital debris office said there was insufficient information about the object for them to make a full assessment: "The object almost certainly is not related to a spacecraft," he said. "It does not look like part of a launch vehicle which has fallen from orbit. However, we cannot be definitive in our judgment without better photos and other data… for example, the date the object fell." Russia has a long tradition of dubious UFO crash stories, and although the Otradnesnky Object has not yet been claimed as a crashed UFO, many elements of a crash retrieval story are already in place. Time will tell! http://fxn.ws/GQoXGe (foxnews.com); *D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, 22 Mar 2012.*

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES UNCOVERS MORE SIGHTINGS OF MYSTERY AIRCRAFT IN NORTH WALES

FLIGHTS FROM NOWHERE (PART 2)

LEFT: Blue Bridge, Rhyl – a good place to spot mystery aircraft or experience 'missing time'.

JENNY RANDLES

The plane was flying very low and heading for Colin

Last month, I reported on a wave of mysterious aircraft sightings over the North Wales coast. My own 2006 sighting of a low-flying plane occurred from Blue Bridge at Rhyl, where the world's first passenger hovercraft service (to the Wirral) ran for 19 days in July 1962. By chance, I saw one of these 'UFOs' as a child when crossing the bridge at the exact same spot as my later sighting.

This bridge was also the focus of a more traditional UFO mystery, reported by a man from Hampshire. Steve explains that in the late 1980s, roughly when the mystery aircraft sightings began, he had a temporary summer job in Rhyl. He stayed in a caravan at the rear of a pub, then known as the Ferry, located on the south-western side of the Blue Bridge. On one occasion, after a hard day's work, Steve decided to spend the evening in Rhyl and, being newly married, phoned his wife from a call box to say goodnight. But the very next thing that he recalled was walking slowly towards the Blue Bridge from Kinmel Bay, with no memory of how he had got there. Six hours had passed and he was on the other side of the river, over a mile from where he had 'just' phoned home.

A young man after a night out, lost in a strange town? But Steve had not overindulged, was medication-free and had no similar blackouts before or since. He adds that as he "came to" his clothing was "undone", though showing no signs of having been slept in. He was also plagued by bad dreams in which he was inside the phone box and stepped out to enter a large grey and white room with a tall figure and two small beings wearing illuminated helmets. This dream was pervaded by a need to escape and is typical of stories from other CE4 witnesses that I have met. This anecdote is like many alien contact cases in my files – an intriguing story with tenuous possible links to UFOs. As Steve has not probed deeper into this 'missing time' we may never know whether there is a mundane explanation for it or if the Blue Bridge has now spawned an alien abduction too.

But the bridge has made the news again – just as I was working on this article – thanks to a report made to American UFO group MUFON. Writing from the UK Midlands, a witness asked: "Did anyone see the UFO in the area of the (Rhyl) Blue Bridge?" and described a "huge object, glowing red, sparks coming off". This witness saw people by the bus stop (directly outside the pub mentioned in Steve's story above), adding that they "must have seen it" because they were "pointing at it".

Here, the date of this report is crucial: 3 March 2012, 9.45pm. At this time, a huge fireball meteor crossed British skies (see Flyingsaucery opposite). So, we can definitely resolve *this* Blue Bridge sighting. But the location remains a hot spot for aerial curiosities.

However, the crucial link between the mystery 'aircraft' cases we examined last month and actual UFOs remained circumstantial until a colleague, Peter McCue, directed me to a report from Colin Grethe which is perhaps the most extraordinary of these episodes. His lucidly expressed account appears on his website (www.eden-two.com). After I tracked him down (he now lives outside Wales) Colin kindly added information about the events. A fascinating case study emerges that ties together elements from these two columns.

Colin was driving along a dark country road near Cwm Llinau in northern mid Wales at around 9.20pm on 27 April 2007. He was heading towards Machynlleth when he observed "a group of bright lights" to the side and ahead over the road. He quickly appreciated that the lights resembled the wingspan of an unseen aircraft. He took in many details, such as wingtip lights, small vertical constructions in front of each tip and a glowing white dome over the wings akin to a cockpit. Inside of this he could even make out the top half of two 'figures'. The 'aircraft' appeared to be an old type and to be rocking up and down as if about to land – a frightening prospect given that it was very low and seemed to heading straight for Colin.

Events now moved in slow motion (the classic psychological response to hyperstress) and Colin scanned his rear view mirror, eager to steer toward safety. But the aircraft just flew right over him. There was no sound of a roaring engine and he didn't see the tail of the craft sweeping overhead, as he expected. Moreover, in the mirror there was now nothing behind him at all. The aircraft – estimated as 50ft (15m) wide – had completely disappeared.

Colin stopped the car and looked around, thinking the plane must have ditched somewhere nearby. But there was only silence. He returned to his vehicle, drove on to a nearby village and gave the police his exact position – the call being received at 9.24pm.

As Colin composed himself for the onward journey, police told him that they would investigate, but that an RAF Hercules had been "in the area" earlier that day. He was later phoned and told that police enquiries had revealed no air traffic at the time and conditions were unsuitable for low flying. Colin's own enquiries with RAF Cosford and airfields around the region, such as Welshpool and Caernarfon, produced the same answer: there was no actual plane in the area that night. But on visiting the police station in Aberystwyth next day, he was now told it must have been the Hercules (though its wingspan would have been far greater than what Colin had seen).

Colin told me that he "remained convinced there were no aircraft in the area at the time" and was "taken aback" by the police response – not least at how they had changed tack overnight despite seeming to take his careful and objective report seriously. He appreciated that "if they had some sort of secret flight then they wouldn't tell me", but has many reasons to doubt this – not least the total silence as the 'plane' passed directly overhead.

So we have a growing file of interlinked cases about this mystery aircraft, identity as yet unknown. Indeed, even as I was editing this piece one of the nurses who visit daily smiled when I started to explain what I was writing about and asked me not to go into detail before telling me of a very similar local incident.

This was on a country road near Abergele, also in 2007, when a large military cargo plane had appeared out of nowhere in the dark, flown silently low over the car and promptly vanished into thin air. Having grown up in the 1950s in this part of North Wales, she told me with a rueful air: "I knew that these sort of things happen round here and you just learn to accept it and move on."

WorldMags.net

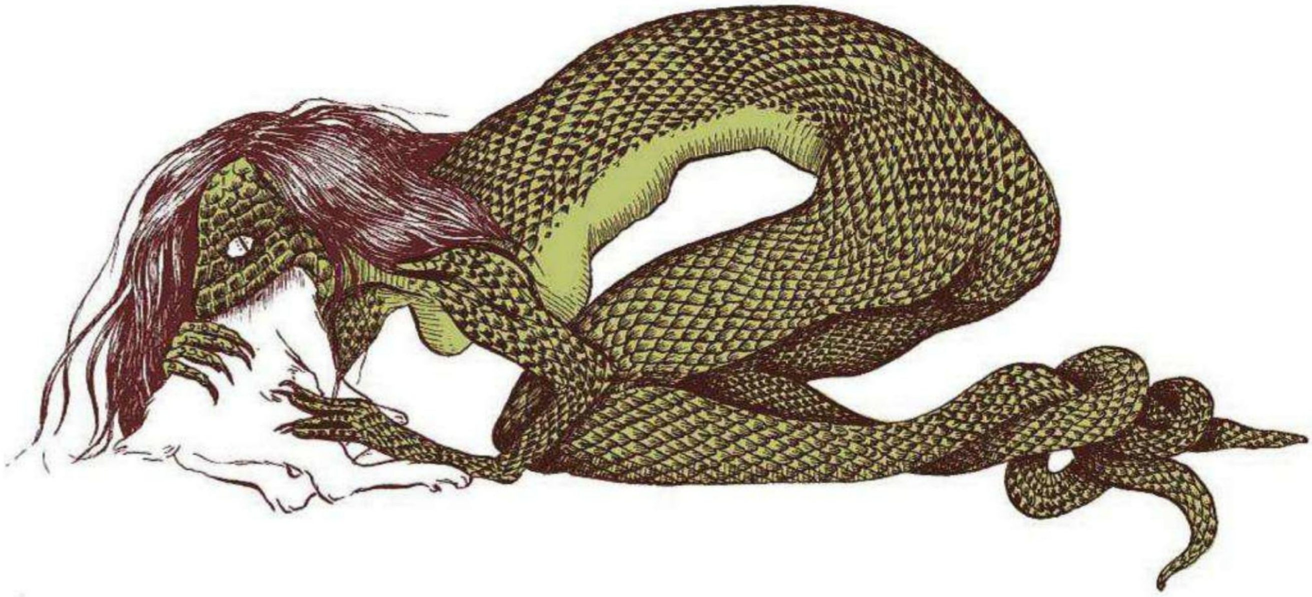
BLASTS FROM THE PAST

FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

38

EVE, THE SNAKE WOMAN OF VIRGINIA

THEO PAIJMANS delves into the world of the carnies and sideshows of early 20th-century America in search of a mysterious serpentine monster…



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

In the latter part of August 1907, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* excitedly told how an expedition had just started from Jamestown, Virginia, headed by several veteran mountaineers. Their purpose was to investigate a weird tale that had been related by a fellow mountaineer on a visit to that city the week before. The man had told the incredible story of a snake-woman who frequented parts of the Moonshine region.

According to him, several witnesses declared that the strange creature resembled a reptile as much as a woman, and the mountaineer claimed to have been one of the very few people to have actually seen her. Rumours of the existence of this snake-woman had circulated for years, he said, telling of "a wild woman with the skin of a snake, who travelled upon the ground like a reptile and subsisted on living prey."

Another mountaineer with first-hand experience of the snake-woman was Stone Colby, who offered to lead the expedition. He added that the stories, rather than being wild exaggerations, only told half the truth. Stone gave some further particulars: "…the snake woman is about 25 years of age, and in physical confirmation and habits so closely approaches the reptile species that she might be regarded as a missing link between it and the human race. Stone declares that she is more like a snake than like a woman. He has never seen her assume an erect position. Covered with the scaly skin of a snake, and shedding it regularly twice a year in one piece, the snake woman glides among the trees and rocks in search of the small animals, mice, frogs, ground squirrels and other forest and swamp prey, which Stone has seen her eat alive, swallowing them, like a reptile, without mastication." [1]

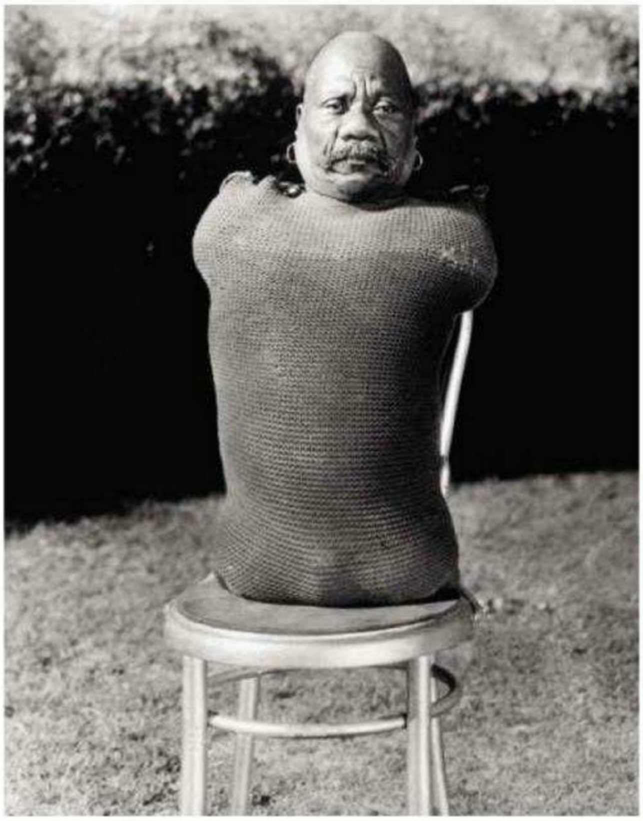
> "Covered with the scaly skin of a snake, and shedding it regularly twice a year in one piece, the snake woman glides among the trees and rocks in search of the swamp prey which she eats alive."

The story was picked up by other newspapers, and in one of them Colby also stated that the mother of the snake-woman lived in a hut "16 miles [26km] in the wilderness and that in former years she bore an unsavoury reputation, being regarded as [a] witch by her distant neighbours". Colby and his fellow expedition member CF Hafley hoped to capture the snake-woman and bring her back to Jamestown for medical inspection. [2] So, off they rode into the wilds of Virginia in pursuit of one of the most remarkable creatures ever to be reported in the state.

Tracking down monster reports in the old newspapers, we read many times of expeditions, hunting parties, local posses and bands of farmers and hunters in pursuit of strange creatures infesting certain locales; and in almost as many instances, nothing is ever found, or the news reports simply dry up. Not in this case, though. Only three days later, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that the Ninth and Arch Museum had reopened for the season, promising a variety of thrills and wonders for the assembled crowds. Among them was Monsieur Monsulla, the famous aerial performer, who walked on steel thread suspended high above the spectators. But the most remarkable feature exhibited in the Curio Hall was, as the newspaper billed it, "one of the weirdest attractions ever exhibited in the city, and the chief attraction". It was Eve, the snake-woman, "a woman with physical attributes and habits closely approaching the reptilian species". [3] These attractions, Eve included, were provided by manager TF Hopkins, who took out an advert in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that read, in bold letters: "Sensation

Of The Century, Eve The Snake Woman, Half Reptile Half Human, Captured Wild and Alive in the Wilderness of Virginia. Woman Or Serpent? Sheds her Skin in One Piece Twice a Year. Hisses When Approached. Has the Scales of a Serpent. Subsists on Small Animals and Frogs." [4]

All of this would suggest that the tale told by the mountaineers and the subsequent 'capture' was a simple piece of promotion to bolster publicity for this unusual exposition. Monster fakes and hoaxes are a dime-a-dozen; one of the oldest and funniest hoaxes was that of the 1840s 'Gyascutus' of Hamburg, South Carolina. In this example, a couple of broke but enterprising fellows invented a tale of the capture, in the wilds, of a fearsome monster. They advertised their remarkable find as "More terrible than the Gnu, the Hyena, or the Ant Eater of the African Desert! Admittance 25 cents; children and servants half price." [5] Upon entering the tent, spectators were faced with a curtain not quite reaching the ground, behind which one of the men crawled on all fours with strips of racoon skin sewed around his wrists and ankles. The announcer then proceeded behind the curtain, from where fearsome howls and shrieks were heard. When the excitement was at its highest, the announcer leaped back into view, exclaiming: "Ladies and gentlemen, save yourselves, the Gyascutus is loose!" After which the crowd stampeded out of the tent.



I have not been able to find anything else about the subsequent fate of Eve the snake-woman, who might have been one of those very special people, like the Tennessee Man-Fish (see **FT255:30**) or Prince Randian (above), the limbless man, who featured in Todd Browning's classic film *Freaks* (1932). Prince Randian was born in 1871 in British Guyana. When not on stage, he was by all accounts a gentle soul who lived with his wife and children in Patterson, New Jersey. He died in 1934, aged 63. He was brought to America in 1889 by PT Barnum, who billed him as 'The Human Caterpillar', 'The Living Torso' or 'The Human Worm'.

> "Prince Randian, the limbless man, when not on stage, was a gentle soul with a wife and family. He was billed by PT Barnum as 'Human Caterpillar', 'Living Torso' or 'Human Worm'."

Delving into the strange and fascinating world of sideshows, carnivals and human marvels throws up some fascinating material. The adverts in a 1915 issue of entertainment publication *The Billboard* – which covered shows, circuses and carnival exhibits – are revealing in the wish lists they display: various managers ask for Human Fishes, Snake Girls, Fat Women, Spider Boys, Human Skeletons and other "Freaks, Curiosities, Side Show Acts". Services on offer included those of a man who billed himself "the elastic skin wonder, strong freak", perfect "for museums, store room or carnival". Then there was Frank, the Ossified Man, who was "ready to sign with first-class carnival". A Miss Vivian Sanford from Kansas City billed herself as "the Human Fish" and modestly admitted that she was "Not best, but as good; worked with ten-in-one show last season". [6]

And, as any good showman can tell you, sometimes sheer ingenuity can go a long way to achieving the desired effect. In 1894, a three-legged girl was exhibited in Coney Island. As the newspaper remarked: "She is by no means a novelty, for there have been three-legged young women on the Bowery before this. But the limb has always been stuffed with sawdust or white sand. Near the Germania House, on the Bowery, there is a museum where the latest sort of 'three-legged girl' is on exhibition. One John Ryan of this city entered the tent yesterday with his girl. The so-called freak on the platform was close to a curtain, from behind which another girl protruded her leg to make three. The illusion was excellent, and visitors who were sceptical were invited to feel the leg. Mr Ryan took advantage of the offer yesterday, but pinched the odd limb so hard that the girl behind the curtain screamed and withdrew it. The audience was rapidly chased outside by the lecturer and assistants, and the other girl retired in disgust." [7]

We can write off Eve, the snake-woman of Virginia, as a clever carnival stunt. Whether she was genuinely deformed or merely an actor in a clever costume remains a question we have no way of answering now. But, there was a certain tradition of 'tall tales' in circulation that might have served as the inspirational template for her. In 1899, a small newspaper from Cripple Creek, Colorado, published the haunting account of a native American who had broken a taboo during hunting, and as punishment was transformed into a snake: "In the middle of the night the elder brother awakened and heard the younger groaning piteously and begging for help. Already the lower part of his body was writhing in the form of a huge snake, and as the elder looked upon him, weeping and helpless to offer aid, the awful change went on. Even as he lifted up his voice in a great cry of agony, his arms sank into his body, his head flattened, and, the cry changing into a hiss, he that had broken the taboo crawled into the thicket." [8]

Notes

[1] "Hunt Animal Half Snake Half Woman. Mountaineers to Search Moonshine Region for Strange Human Creature Who Resembles a Reptile", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 21 Aug; "Mountaineers Seek Strange Creature", *Washington Post*, Washington, DC, 22 Aug 1907.

[2] "Hunting A Snake Woman. Jamestown Exposition Set by Ears Through Tale of Mountaineer", *Trenton Evening Times*, Trenton, New Jersey, 22 Aug 1907.

[3] "Museum Opens Today", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 Aug 1907.

[4] *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 25 Aug 1907.

[5] "The Gyascutus", *Southport Telegraph*, Southport, Wisconsin, 17 Feb 1845.

[6] *The Billboard*, 23 Jan; 27 Mar 1915.

[7] "Pinched Her Leg", *Delphos Daily Herald*, Delphos, Ohio, 30 July 1894. Cites the *New York World*.

[8] "Changed Into A Snake. Fate Of A Cherokee Hunter Who Broke a Taboo", *Morning Times*, Cripple Creek, Colorado, 10 Mar 1899.

Vampire Killing Kit

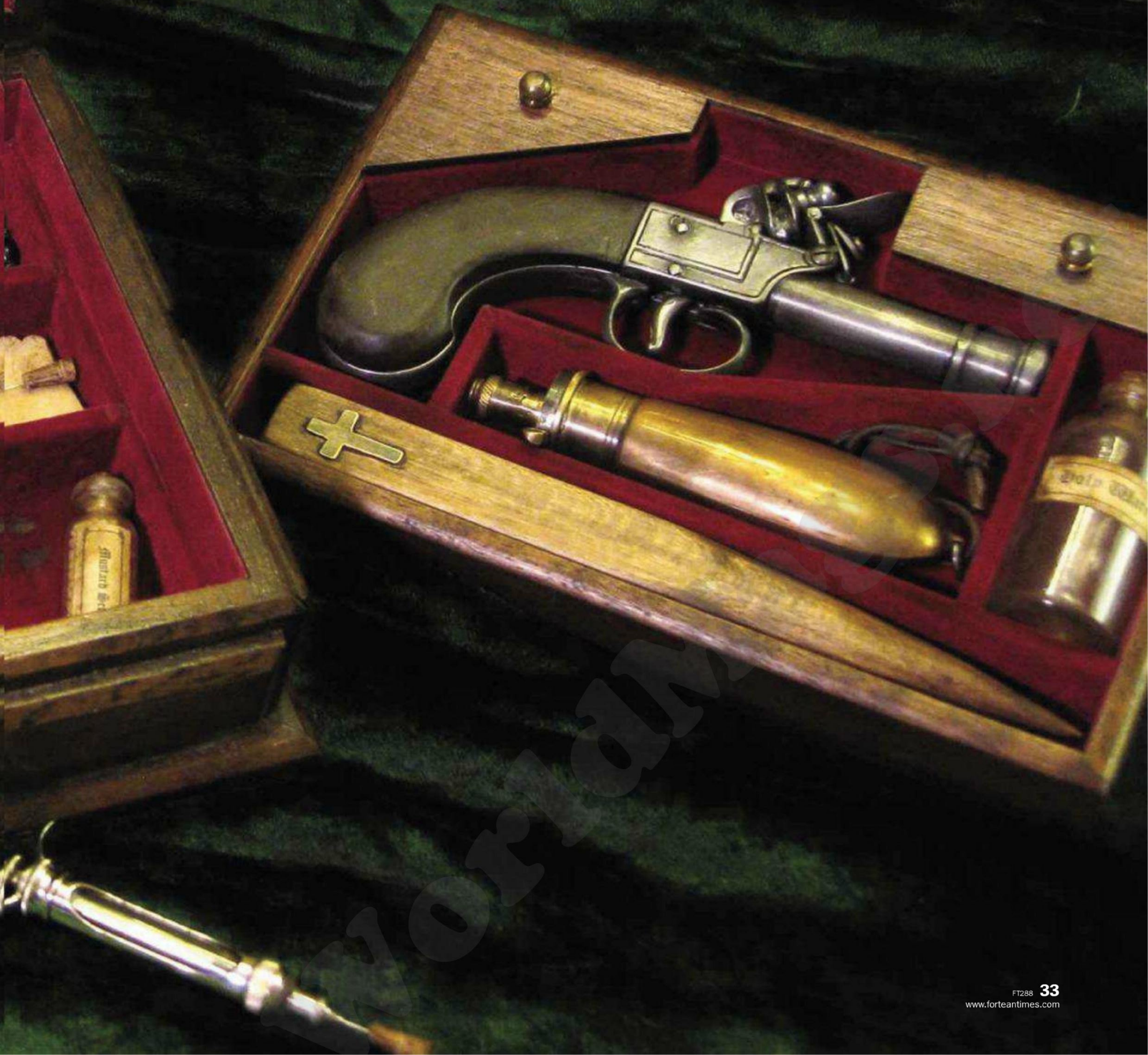
This box contains the items considered necessary, for the protection of persons who travel into certain little known countries in Eastern Europe, where the populace are plagued with a particular manifestation of evil known as Vampires. Professor Ernst Blomberg respectfully requests that the purchaser of this kit, carefully studies his book in order, should evil manifestations become apparent, he is equipped to deal with them efficiently. Professor Blomberg wishes to announce his grateful thanks to that well known gunmaker of Liege, Nicholas Plomdeur, whose help in compiling of the special items, the bullets, etc., has been most efficient.

The items enclosed are as follows.
(1) An efficient pistol with its usual accoutrements.
(2) Bullets of the finest quality.
(3) Crucifix & rosary.
(4) Holy water.
(5) A wooden stake
(6) Professor Blomberg's new serum.
(7) Assortment of apothecaries and a syringe.

PAT REILLY

TO KILL A VAMPIRE

Vampire-killing kits are now fetching high prices at auction – but are these mysterious cases containing crosses, pistols and holy water genuine antiques, clever fakes or playful artworks? **JONATHAN FERGUSON** sharpens his stakes, loads up his silver bullets and prepares to investigate... Main pic by **PATRICK REILLY**

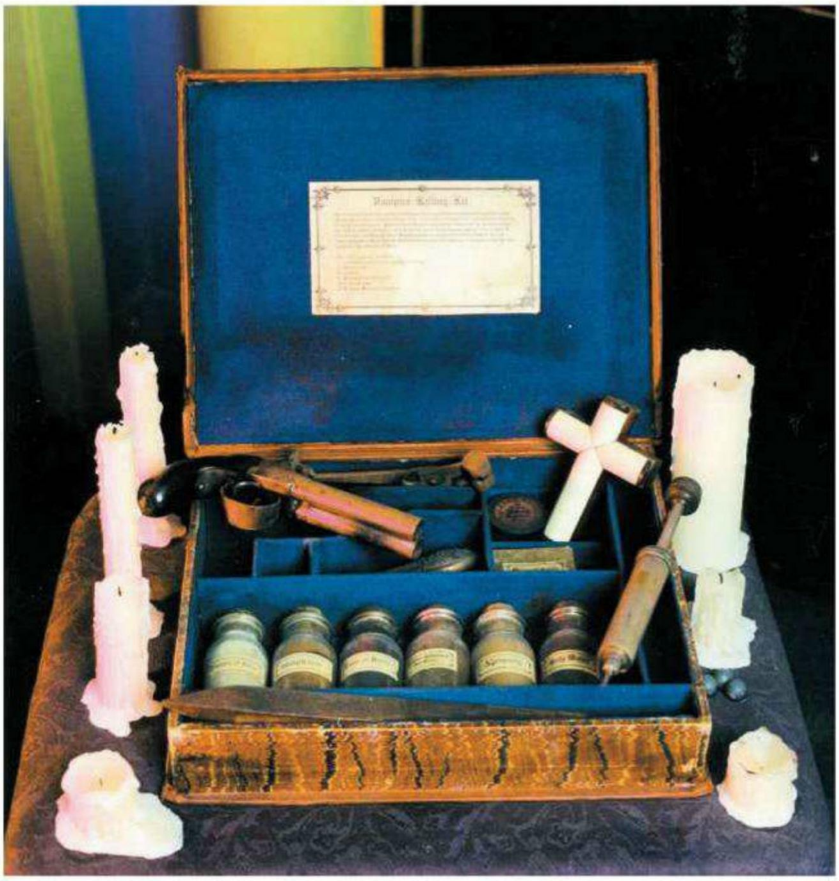


Vampire-killing kits: mysterious cased weapons and accoutrements for the ostensible disposal of the undead. Some are very obviously of 21st-century manufacture, but there is an older tradition of high-quality kits comprising genuine period objects. Such composite antiques are inherently difficult to date or assess, yet they routinely command prices in the thousands. In October 2011, a 'vampire-killing kit' sold at a major international auction house for $25,000.[1] The standing record is even higher, at $26,400, paid to the same house in 2004.[2] It was catalogued with a description typical for these items:

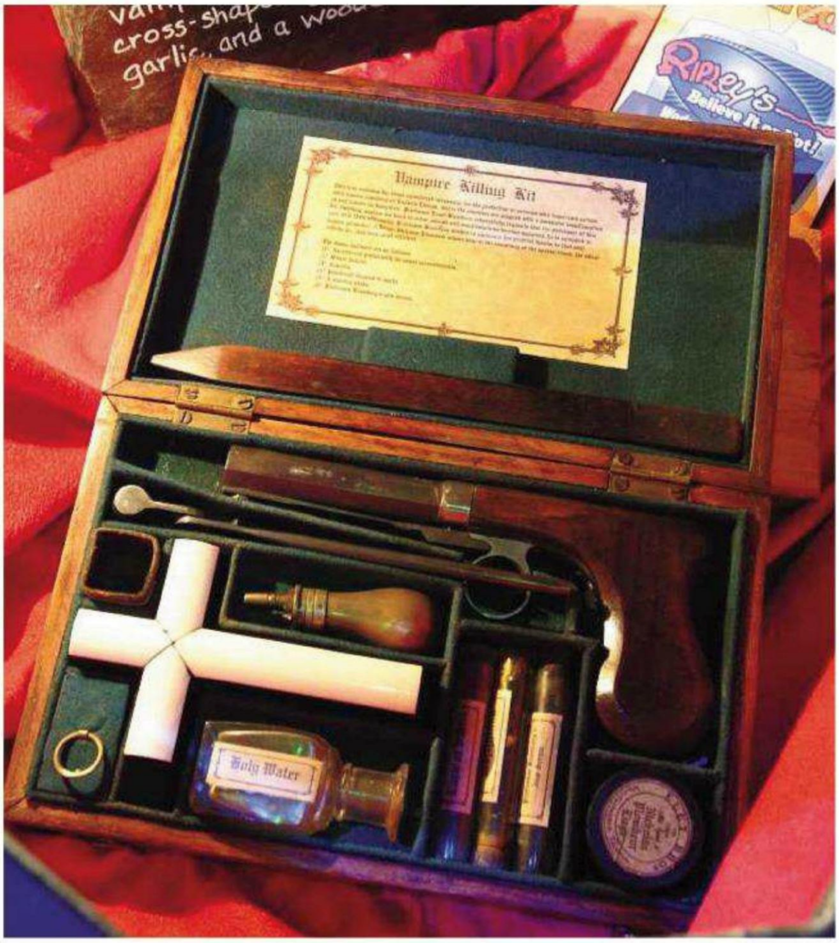
"A VAMPIRE KILLING KIT CIRCA 1900. The walnut box with brass lock and red plush fitted interior containing a wood stake, a double-barrel pistol, nine bullets, six bullet cloths, an ivory-mounted wood crucifix, serum and a lidded tin containing powdered flowers of garlic."

Two main claims are made regarding their authenticity as historical objects. The first is that they are mid-to-late 19th-century in date, and actually intended for killing vampires – the existence, or not, of the latter notwithstanding. This continues to be claimed by antiques dealers and the media.[3] It also remains the official position of Ripley's Believe It Or Not!, who are the biggest collector of the kits, possessing exactly 40 at the time of writing, many of which are displayed in their 'Odditoriums' worldwide.[4]

Superficially, the claim is plausible enough. In the West, the lines between fiction, folklore, and reality were becoming blurred by the mid-19th century, a period that saw the emergence of Spiritualism and the first New Age religions. Indeed, one vampire-killing kit may have occult associations, bearing the magical phrase "*aski kataski haix tetrax damnameneus aision*" on its lid.[5] More obviously, a fear of vampires persisted in parts of Eastern Europe throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, expressed in the scapegoating of dead bodies for a whole range of problems in a local area. As the 2004 case of Petre Toma showed, these beliefs have survived more or less intact into the present day.[6] However, the agricultural tools used in that case also reflect the folkloric tradition of improvised vampire-slaying weapons, like the sexton's spade or wooden stake. Purpose-made weapons like swords are as elaborate as it gets in these cases.[7] There is simply no historical precedent for an expensive, purpose-built, ready-to-use travelling 'kit', nor, one might add, for any fear of vampire attack on the part of Western European travellers. Also lacking is any real-world parallel for the sort of pseudoscientific specialist vampire-slayer established in fiction by Bram Stoker's Professor Van Helsing in the novel *Dracula*. That character is an extension of an earlier Gothic figure – the consultant exorcist as depicted in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, originally published in 1796. This character even carries what might be termed a 'demon-exorcising kit' in the form of a 'chest'. Like the valise carried by his later successor in *The Exorcist* novel (1971) and film (1973), this



COURTESY OF RIPLEY ENTERTAINMENT INC.



COURTESY OF RIPLEY ENTERTAINMENT INC.

TOP: Ripley's Believe It Or Not! has the world's largest collection of vampire-killing kits; it currently stands at 40, including this specimen with a 'Blomberg' label.
ABOVE: A fine 'Blomberg' kit from the Ripley's Museum in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

features a crucifix and a Bible, as indeed do the vampire-killing kits.

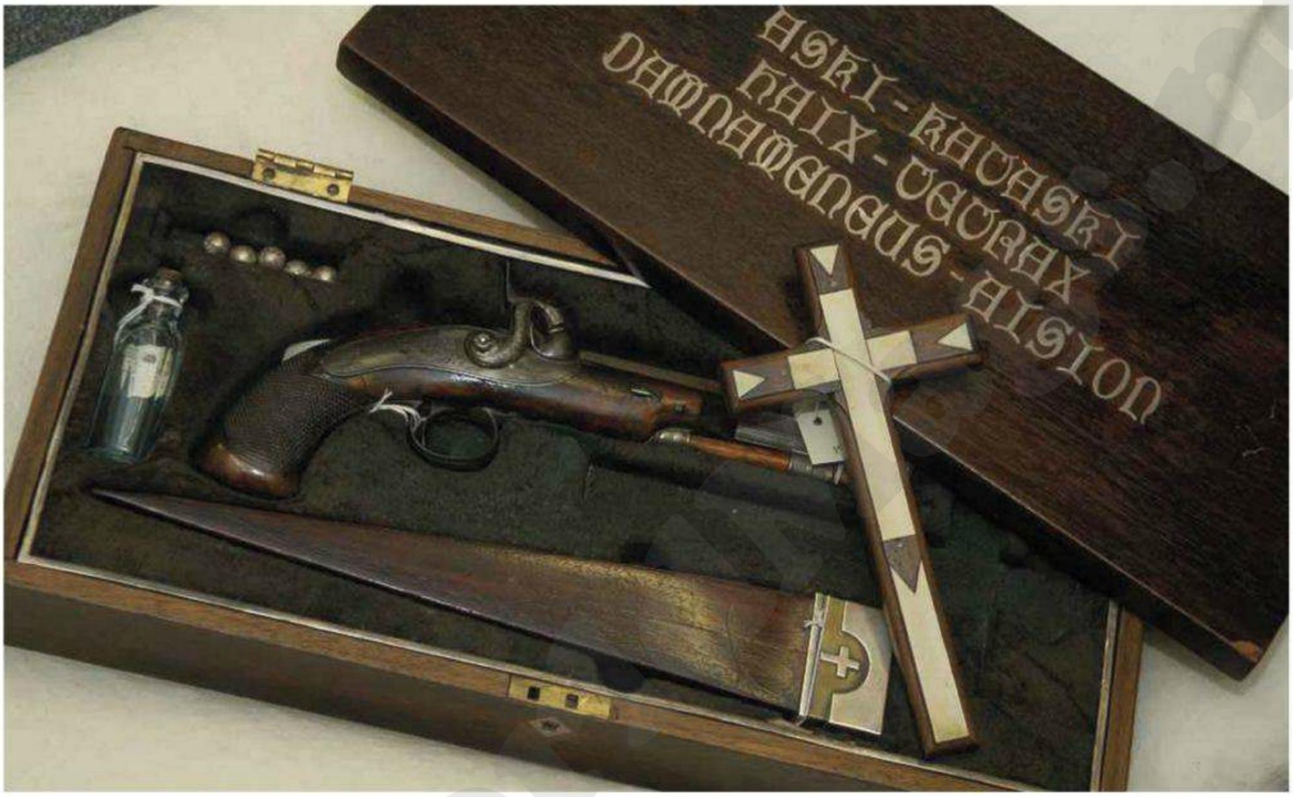
Yet even Stoker's fictional slayer carries "something like a cricketing bag" to accommodate the large and heavy tools of his trade. It's not until the 1960s that we see the easily portable suite of weapons; Peter Cushing's monogrammed Gladstone in Hammer's *Brides of Dracula* (1960), and its parodic equivalent in Polanski's *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967). Interestingly, the first vampire kit resembling the subject of this article does not reach the big screen until 1985's *Fright Night*.

So, both kit and killer as we know them appear to originate in fiction, not folklore; fantasy, not history. In any case, the suggestion of a 19th-century vampire kit amounts to a straightforward reiteration of the claims found on the associated case label, and a face-value dating of case and contents.[8] The next possibility is that we are dealing with more recent novelty items, made in the wake of the publication of *Dracula* and marketed to travellers to Eastern Europe. This hypothesis is that most often given or implied by auction houses, hence the date of 1900 attributed to the record-setting kit described above.[9] It would certainly explain their small size. Again there is no contemporary reference to the kits, let alone a bill of sale or advertisement. Whereas we might expect a kit meant for 'actual' vampire-slaying to be a 'black market' item, the absence of evidence is perhaps surprising if we take the vampire kit as an early 20th-century tourist souvenir. Nonetheless, we will maintain an open mind for the time being.

Finally, there are more recent origins to consider. The first kit sold by a mainstream auction house in 1994 was unequivocally described as "only a romantic pastiche". The Sotheby's representative at the time went so far as to state definitively that "there was never a vampire kit" and that the lot in question had been created "to make money".[10] It was only after this kit had fetched $12,000 (three times the estimate), that the early 20th-century origin sparked by the popularity of Stoker's book was put forward. Whether intended pastiche or deliberate fake, some or all vampire kits may have been put together in recent years to pass as either Victorian original or Edwardian novelty in order to make a profit from unwary buyers. It is difficult to escape this conclusion with respect to many of the less well-made examples. Features that are obviously spurious include the modern screw-top bottles, hardware store fittings, and the clearly hand-aged contents of the first kit seen by the author.[11] This also contained a 'replica' dagger then available for sale from the 'Battle Orders' website, and was cased in an oddly charred pine box. Though examined at the time only through photographs, this assessment was confirmed in person by the author some four years later, the kit in question having been purchased by a serious collector.

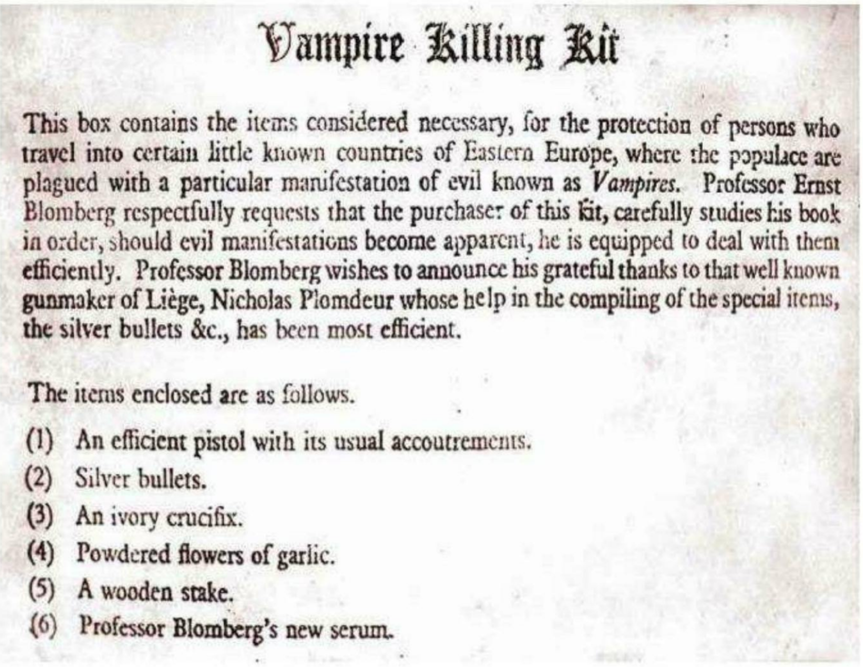
> Both kit and killer seem to originate in fiction...

Visible discrepancies are few in the 'high end' kits, but do exist. One kit supposedly 'liberated' by a GI in World War II contains a pistol with a bright, freshly scratched finish and a red felt case lining that is strangely vibrant after more than a century, staining the ivory on both pistol and case.[12] Though the lining is worn in places, this would be easy to reproduce by means of abrasion. Most kits are not so easily dismissed, and appear 'right' even under close-up examination, as they consist of wholly antique contents and materials. However, replicating one would be a relatively simple matter of refitting a small antique pistol, writing, vanity, or instrument case with lining and compartment partitions cannibalised from a larger case. Many partitions are irregularly arranged and sometimes even vary in thickness. As sceptic and vampirologist Joe Nickell has recently commented, this might suggest cutting of the wooden pieces and recovering using the antique baize or felt.[13] Without destroying the case to examine cut edges and test the adhesives used, it would be impossible to definitively determine a true age. This might also explain why so few vampire kits feature larger pistols, as it would be difficult to find a donor case large enough to outfit a full-sized pistol box. Kits with travelling or target/duelling pistols eschew the traditional English partitioned style of case in favour of a solid wooden block with hollowed compartments in the Continental fashion.



VICTORIA POLICE MUSEUM, MELBOURNE

ABOVE: This unusual kit, bearing a Greek inscription and containing an Irish pistol, was seized by Australian police from a Romanian.



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The items enclosed are as follows.

(1) An efficient pistol with its usual accoutrements.
(2) Silver bullets.
(3) An ivory crucifix.
(4) Powdered flowers of garlic.
(5) A wooden stake.
(6) Professor Blomberg's new serum.

JONATHAN FERGUSON

LEFT: A 'Blomberg' label. **CENTRE:** A cruciform pistol on the cover of *Guns & Ammo* magazine. **BOTTOM:** Another kit from the Ripley collection.

Another approach

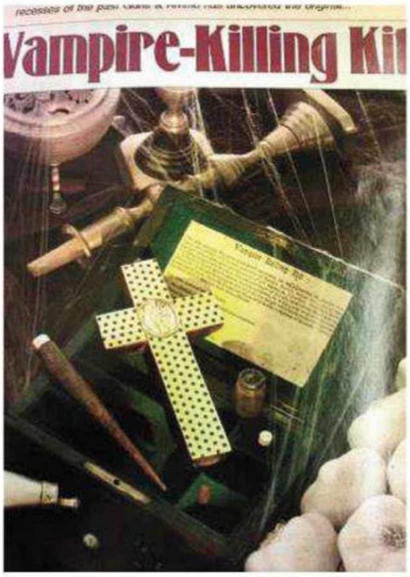
Even if every extant kit were eliminated as spurious, doubt would remain that they still represented a genuine category of object – that there might be an original out there somewhere upon which the reproductions or fakes were based. So, another approach is needed. By assessing each component of the vampire-killing kit in historical, folkloric and fictional context, it should be possible to establish the point at which sufficient awareness existed of the relevant lore to inspire creation of the kits and enable their marketing.

The 'Blomberg' label

Though no two kits are identical, most bear some version of a label made after the fashion of a pistol-maker or retailer's trade label, always in English, despite a purported continental origin. This lists the contents and attributes the kit(s) to a Professor Ernst Blomberg. Online researchers have identified various similarly-named candidates, but none have any convincing link with the kits.[14]

A wooden stake

This is one of the few consistent elements of vampire lore, and the least problematic aspect of the kits. Though kit stakes tend to resemble 'Mr Pointy' from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, folklore shows that size really didn't matter. Even thorns were considered permissible and viable weapons.[15] The fence post-sized stakes described by Stoker also agree with the larger stakes of folklore, but are at odds with the idea that *Dracula* is the vampire kit's 19th- or early 20th-century inspiration. Likewise, few kits incorporate (and none specify) a knife or dagger as used to both decapitate the fictional Count and against folkloric vampires in Serbia. No kit yet observed contains tools capable of effecting incineration, a common means of destruction as related in folklore.



An ivory crucifix

Another staple of fiction and folklore, though not wielded in close 'combat' by folkloric slayers, who sensibly prefer to confront their prey while bloated and immobile in the grave. One Croatian clergyman did take on a revenant (rather than a vampire *per se*) with his crucifix in 1672.[16] Both crosses and cross-pistols often feature the letters 'IHS' (for the first three letters of Christ's name in Greek) and in some cases a religious medallion featuring a winged saint, presumably Saint Michael due to his association with the exorcism of evil spirits. Note that no Blomberg kit actually contains the ivory *crucifix* (i.e. Jesus on the cross) specified in the label. We might expect a period maker or user, Catholic or otherwise, to know the difference. Ivory appears to be a wholly 'Blombergian' specification. A related item frequently included, but not listed in the label, is the rosary.

Garlic and holy water

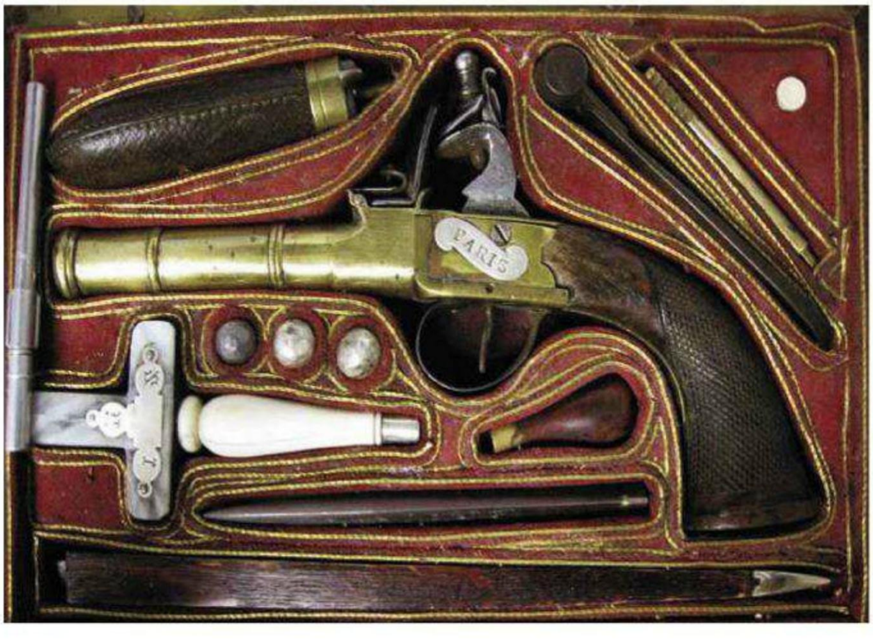
Whereas the label lists only 'Powdered Flowers of Garlic' and 'Blomberg's New Serum', many kits go further and include holy water, sacred earth, elixir of vitriol (a tonic), and flour of brimstone (a laxative!). The garlic is of course a staple of folklore as, to a lesser extent, is holy water. Perhaps by coincidence, the idea of a vampirism serum has a parallel with a practice of ingesting grave earth, but like the remaining items, is fictional. The 'sacred earth' is an invention of Stoker himself.

Mirrors

The mirror as a defensive weapon also originates with *Dracula* and its various adaptations. Perhaps surprisingly, it crops up rarely in kits.

'An efficient pistol'

The inclusion of a firearm (an 'efficient pistol, as the 'Blomberg label' has it) may



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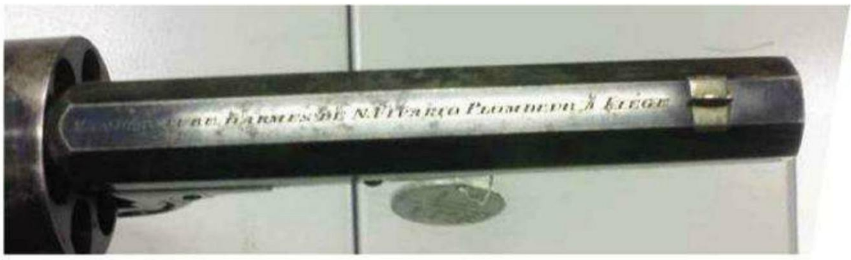


JONATHAN FERGUSON

LEFT: Nicolas Plomdeur's name on the barrel of an 1870 percussion revolver. **BOTTOM:** A typical Belgian muzzle-loading percussion pocket pistol of the 1840s–1860s. **BOTTOM INSET:** A 'silver' bullet stamped with a cross.

appear incongruous, but in fact there is a strong folkloric tradition dating back to 1836. However, it is important to note that this was not published in English until 1974.[17] The fictional *Varney the Vampire* appeared in 1845 and was widely read, but the titular vampire was only stunned by a pistol shot, and not known to be a vampire at the time.

Though Emily Gerard's non-fiction *Land Beyond the Forest* and Stoker's *Dracula* (which paraphrases Gerard) were published in 1888 and 1897 respectively, only *Dracula* was to become mainstream, and then not until post-1922 (Murnau's film *Nosferatu* having raised the profile of its source novel). In a handful of kits, the 'efficient pistol' is replaced by a pistol crossbow, another fictional weapon where vampires are concerned, first appearing in Hammer's *Vampire Circus* (1972), closely followed by Marvel's *Tomb of Dracula* comic.[18]

Most kits are built around a cheap and anonymous Belgian percussion pocket pistol. These were the 'Saturday night specials' of their day – at odds with the rest of these otherwise 'fancy' kits, and with the very idea of a product for those able to afford continental travel.

As to the gun-maker referenced on the labels, there was indeed a Nicolas Vivario-Plomdeur active in Paris from 1842 to 1888.[19] Like most makers, he doubtless produced or retailed unsigned pistols of this sort alongside his more expensive offerings. However, most labels omit 'Vivario' and give an incorrect, anglicised spelling of the forename.

In one of only two instances of named pistols from vampire kits, the surname is also misspelled, and unusually, is lightly stamped (rather than engraved) on the bottom barrel flat. The other pistol so marked has been recently and roughly hand-engraved. On genuine pistols, Plomdeur's name appears in a quite different typeset and always in the form 'N. Vivario-Plomdeur' (often alongside 'Arquebusier Du Roi', or 'Gunmaker to the King').[20]

Some kits instead contain a unique type of cruciform pistol employing a simple spring-hammer mechanism found on underhammer percussion designs of the mid-19th century, specifically those based on an American patent of 1849.[21]

Some form of underhammer pistol does seem to appear on Vivario-Plomdeur's trade label, though the cruciform version remains without parallel outside of these kits.[22] From photographs, they appear to lack any real sign of age, and have crudely bored and crowned barrels set in roughly made wooden 'stocks'.

> The earliest reference to a kit is from the 1980s

Silver bullets

Appropriately enough, it is the silver bullet that may help 'slay' the vampire-killing kit. While the vulnerability of other supernatural foes to silver bullets is well documented, their first vampiric association is a far later and unreferenced claim by Montagu Summers in *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin* (1928).[23] A handful of post-war short stories including Ray Bradbury's 'The Man Upstairs' (1947) run with the idea, and it crops up in the Universal film *Curse of the Undead* (1959).

But the idea would not begin to make its mark on mainstream pop culture until Peter Cushing cast a bullet for his Colt Deringer from a silver crucifix in *Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1974). Not until the late 20th century do we find a folkloric reference to a quartered silver coin fired from a shotgun.[24] Around the same time, John Steakley's novel *Vampire$* started the modern trend for silver-loaded pistols. Several kits contain silver (more often actually pewter) bullets marked with crosses. This is not claimed to be a traditional anti-vampire precaution until a 1966 issue of *Penthouse* magazine, subsequently reinforced by the *Tomb of Dracula* comic in 1975.[25]

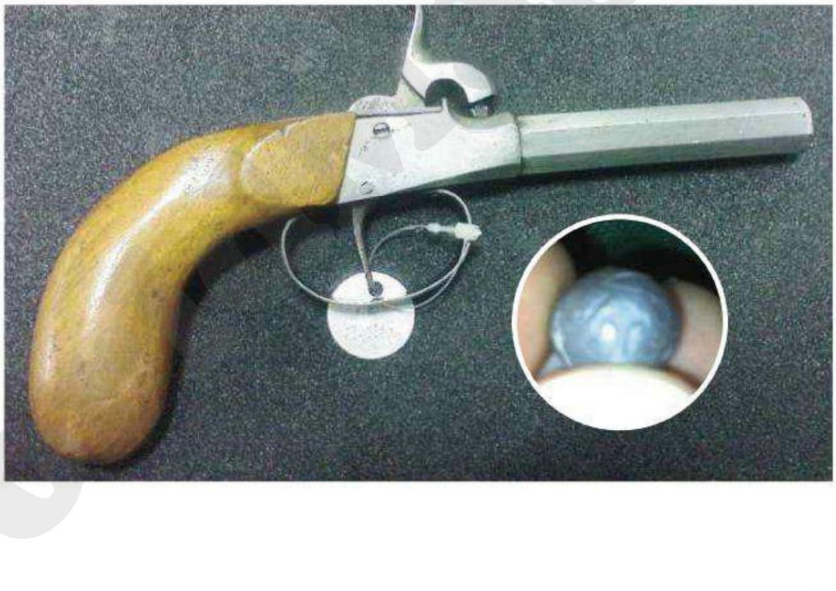
What if?

Though the kits vary a great deal, the wording of the Blomberg label changes little. The actual contents don't always agree, suggesting extensive copying of the basic concept, but the use of whatever period items and materials are available when putting the kit together. Though some items might easily have been lost, replaced, or, heaven forbid, even 'used', the cross-pistols present a particular problem, as their kits have been designed around them, yet they are not listed separately in the case label.

There are at least half a dozen kits that use what appears to be the original form of the Blomberg label, and contain the spurious cross-marked 'silver' bullets. One is the only vampire kit ever to have been scientifically tested. Based upon analysis by the world-renowned Winterthur Museum in the US, the object's labelling now dates it into the 1970s or 1980s, as well as showing that it was not gifted to the collection until 1989. The only other kit held by a *bona fide* museum was seized (appropriately enough) from a Romanian immigrant, but not until 1994.[26] This reflects a wider problem with these objects – a lack of provenance. The supposed German museum provenance of the World War II kit referred to above is 'by tradition' only.[27] We lack any verified example that might provide a precedent of authenticity, as it were, for the others.

In fact, there is no printed reference to a kit until the mid-1980s, when another kit of this type (complete with cross-marked bullets) appeared in a mail order catalogue produced by House of Swords and Militaria, printed in or around 1986.[28]

It may be worth noting that the dealer in question was later accused of fraudulent activities and ceased trading in 1992.[29] The next earliest is that published in *Guns & Ammo* in 1989.



COURTESY OF THE TRUSTEES OFTHE ARMOURIES

I MADE A VAMPIRE-KILLING KIT!

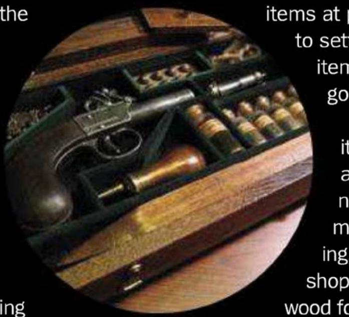
PATRICK REILLY tells *FT* how he created the gorgeous object that graces this issue's cover.

A while back, I was watching a television program called *Auction Kings*. It's a standard reality show involving old objects and their potential worth on the auction block. In this particular episode, an interesting item came up: a vampire-killing kit.

Whether or not the kit was authentic wasn't what interested me – it was simply the fact that this was such a bizarre concept. So, rather than spending $12,000 at auction, I thought I'd try my hand at making one… or two… or even three.

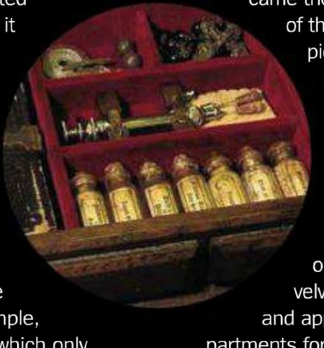
I soon discovered that the kits (whether genuine items, hoaxes or the work of creative hobbyists – the debate is ongoing) came in two distinct types. The first, generic type appeared to be made by unspecified suppliers and was usually quite large and constructed in a rather random fashion.

The second type of kit is known as the 'Blomberg Kit'. These are the most iconic of the kits, and have a unique style which makes them instantly recognisable as 'Blombergs'. They also have the iconic trademark, a label found pasted on the inside top lid of the box giving the purchaser some information about the kit.



I decided that I was first going to make one of the generic style kits and then a 'Blomberg'.

The first thing I needed for my generic kit was a carrying case. I spent a week on eBay, doing 'vintage old antique wooden box case' searches. I hadn't expected the search to be as difficult as it turned out to be, but I had a specific style of case in mind. I didn't want something gaudy that looked as if it came out of a cheesy 1950s horror film; I wanted a case that was classy and in a 19th-century style. I also had to make sure that the parts on the case matched the period – which meant, for example, no Philips cross-head screws, which only came into being during the 1930s.



After I found my box, I had to buy the items to put in it, making them appear as authentic as possible: stakes, crucifix, pistol, percussion caps or powder flask, ball bullets, apothecary bottles, dagger, Bible, and so on. I managed to pick up authentic antique items at pretty low prices, but I had to settle for reproduction antique items in some cases to avoid going bankrupt.

Next, I had to lay the items out inside the case and figure out the spaces needed for the compartments. After a lot of measuring, I went to a local hobby shop and picked up some basswood for the compartment walls. I used a Dremel tool, a hacksaw, a few files and plenty of sandpaper. After the walls were cut to size, I used wood glue to attach them to the case.

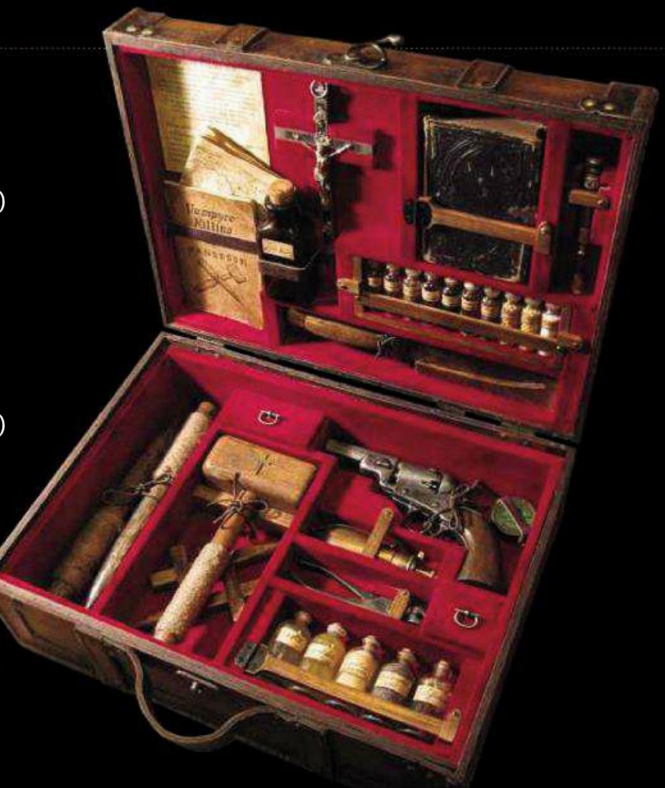
With the compartments all in place, then came the hard part: lining the inside of the case with adhesive velvet picked up online. I can't even begin to describe how much measuring I had to do to get the velvet to perfectly fit inside the case. Basically, I had to explode the view of the walls and figure out how it would be translated onto the flat surface of the velvet. Once the velvet was cut and applied, I created some compartments for the kit. One of the biggest challenges was the removable laboratory that houses the row of apothecary bottles on the inside top lid of this case. I designed it so that the two hinges on the side could be swivelled up or down and allow the entire tray holding the bottles to be removed. Once removed, the tray would act as a mini stand-up lab.

Once I was done with my first kit, I decided to try my hand at a 'Blomberg'. This was much easier, since the 'Blomberg' kits are usually pretty small – the size of a cigar box or a vintage gun case. While I included everything but the kitchen sink in my first kit, the 'Blomberg' was more limited (which is accurate for a Blomberg-style kit). I used the same methods, although the limited number of items made it a lot easier. After I was done with the second kit, I decided to make another with a green velvet lining.

A few months back, I sold my first kit on eBay to a buyer in Canada, but I still own the two smaller 'Blomberg' kits and can say without doubt that I am still fully prepared to do battle with the undead.

THE KIT INCLUDES

- 1849 Colt pocket pistol
- 10 ball bullets (concealed in one of the compartments)
- a brass and copper powder flask
- .31 calibre ball bullet mould
- one percussion cap tin
- wooden mallet
- two wooden stakes
- two mini-crucifix stakes
- Rosary beads (concealed in one of the compartments)
- one metal and wood crucifix
- one dagger
- 1873 Bible
- Knotted rope
- Vampyre-Killing Kit Handbook
- Map of Romania
- one bottle of Holy Water
- 15 phials of apotropaic serums, potions, and repellents.



PHIALS CONTENTS INCLUDE

- Holy oil
- Garlic powder
- Liquid garlic
- Consecrated earth
- Wolfsbane
- Hawthorn
- Brimstone
- Wild rose
- Root of mandrake
- Elixir of vitriol
- Vampyre serum
- Poppy seeds
- Mustard seeds
- Romanian millet
- Lunar caustic (silver nitrate)

ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE BY PATRICK REILLY

Val Forgett, a collector and replica arms dealer from 1956 onwards, stated that he found this kit at a US gun show.[30] Indeed, the vast majority of vampire kits have come to light in the United States. However, it was an Englishman, Michael de Winter of Torquay, who in 2005 claimed to have created the first of these kits, and this apparently original form of Blomberg label, in 1972 as a promotional item for his antiques stall.[31] Mr de Winter has confirmed this claim to the author in writing, supplying a photocopy of the label. The date *is* consistent with the popularisation of all of the relevant pieces of vampire lore, and it would be around this time that the market was ready for what has since been described by a source in the auction trade as a "cottage industry".

This market is mirrored by that for movie memorabilia and props, which attracts much interest from wealthy, professional people looking for pieces of fiction made tangible. Even props without 'screen-used' provenance command high prices, and hobbyists and entrepreneurs have both turned their hands to making 'replica prop' versions of vampire-killing kits.[32] One highly elaborate 'original' kit has been described as "a piece of contemporary art" and it may be that others began life in this way.[33] A piece in the 'Surnateum' collection in Brussels, Belgium, comes complete with a fictional provenance involving both Jack the Ripper and Adolf Hitler.

Like the collection of Alex CF (complete with 'Vampire Biological Research Case', see **FT283:48–50**), the 'Surnateum' is not a museum in the traditional sense. Like the curiosity cabinets of old, it mixes the genuine with the spurious and is concerned with authenticity only as a means to add interest and excitement. It is curated by a Belgian illusionist and mentalist, and, as with stage magic, a sort of 'honest' deception is arguably necessary for suspension of disbelief and audience enjoyment.[34] Perhaps the same could be said of all vampire kits as 'what if' objects. However, interest is such that even kits with disclaimers maintain their value. A kit sold by Christie's in 2010 had appended a clarification that "the contents of the box were assembled in the second half of the 20th century", yet was still purchased for £6,000 by a wealthy entrepreneur.[35]

Conclusion

There is little evidence, if any, for vampire-killing kits as historical objects. The authenticity of those that do exist is to some extent a matter of perception and certainly of representation by the seller, as the intent of the maker is usually unknowable. Indeed, is it possible to create a fake if the item in question never existed historically? Michael de Winter described his efforts to me as "not making a fake, merely inventing an item". Of the more obviously modern kits in their collection, Ed Meyer of Ripley's has said, "If I've got a vampire-killing kit made in 1962 – or in 2002 – it still allows me to talk about vampires."[36] Indeed, whatever else the kits may be, they remain fascinating cultural artefacts of the late 20th century, reflecting the reinterpretation and adaptation of folklore and history as entertainment media. The vampire-killing kit is a movie prop without a film – a fictional artefact of an imagined past. **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

JONATHAN FERGUSON is Curator of Firearms at the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds. Prior to taking up this post in 2009, he worked at the National War Museum of Scotland, Imperial War Museum, Duxford, and Colchester Museum. His research interests include the use and effect of firearms and their related mythology and folklore. He has been interested in vampires since being given a Ladybird adaptation of *Dracula* as a child.

NOTES

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19 Eugène Heer: *Der Neue Stockel Vol.2*, Journal-Verlag, Schwend, 1978, p968. (N.B. for weapons marked "Haaken-Plomdeur", see Graham Burnside: "Nicolas Plomdeur – Liege", *Gun Report*, June 1962, pp20–22, which refer to Liege maker Charles Haaken, who seems to have entered into a joint Parisian venture with Plomdeur from 1849–1859; see Heer: *Der Neue Stockel vol.1*.)

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http://thevampirologist.blogspot.com; http://doaav.blogspot.com/. 'VKKs' occasionally feature on the excellent blog of vampirilogist Anthony Hogg.

http://bshistorian.wordpress.com. The author's blog, containing the original series of posts that led to this article; direct link to vampire-related posts – http://bit.ly/GGnoXJ (bshistorian.wordpress.com).

Acknowledgements

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118. Creatures of the Night

GEORGE BINNING has a late night chat with Dr Gregory L Reece, the historian of religion who hangs out with werewolves and vampires...

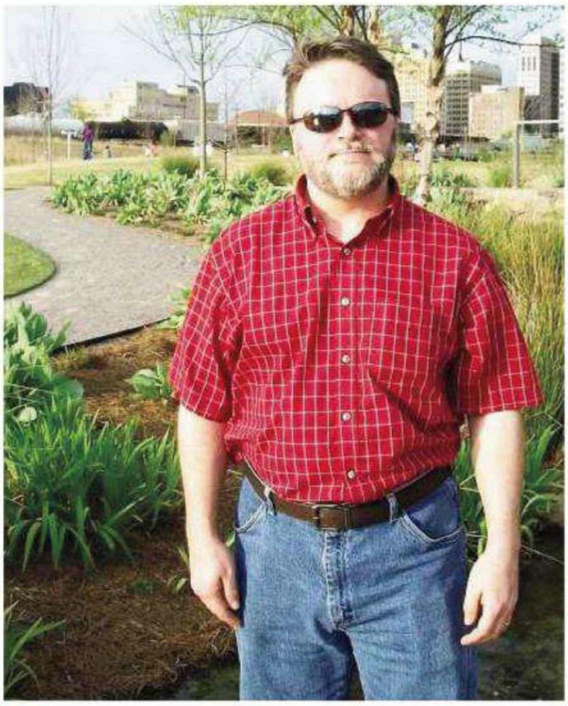
It was a dark and stormy night, and I sat alone. An image, a face from the other side, appeared before me. I was "Skyping" Dr Gregory L Reece, author of *Creatures of the Night*, on the other side of the Atlantic, in Alabama.

Having tackled the subjects of *Weird Science* (2008) and *UFO Religions* (2007), Dr Reece is now dabbling with the occult. In his new book, he befriends a werewolf, chats up a lady in a vampire bar, and attends Mass with both exorcists and Satanists.

"It's one of those things I love about what I do. Wolf Van Zandt – the werewolf that I talk about in the book – lives very near to me, so we've managed to stay in contact. As soon as the book comes out in the States I'll make a point of having a lunch date with him and take him a copy. He's a wonderful guy and fun to hang out with."

Self-professed werewolves and vampires are two major races of the Otherkin diaspora (**FT283:44–46**), those who identify with mythical creatures, both physically and often in more transcendental ways.

"The vampires I've met tend to be very sincere in their approach and they really want to make sure the world gets some understanding of who they are," Reece tells me.


DR GREGORY L REECE

ABOVE: Dr Gregory L Reece: quite a nice chap really.

> "Vampires are normal people who have nine-to-five jobs"

He also spent a weekend with Druwydion Pendragon/Orion/David de Paul, a man known at various times of his life as the leader of the Brotherhood of Satan, 'Ipsissimus, High Priest and King of the Morning Star', and 'Grand Master, Ancient of Knights of the Temple of Solomon, Baphomet Preceptory'. Although it is said (by William Schnoebelin, the Satanist-turned-Evangelical Christian) that Pendragon had, in the 1980s, boasted of human sacrifice, Reece describes him and the 'theistic' Brotherhood as pretty average people, "except that they don't go to church. Instead they come together four times a year for their special ceremonies.

"Likewise, with vampires. They're not bloodsucking fiends that haunt the shadows, but normal people who have normal five-day-a-week jobs and just happen to be vampires."

The werewolves, vampires and Satanists that Reece actually meets all seem quite cuddly, but one has to consider the possibility that, as Schnoebelin claims, some of their practices are perhaps more diabolical behind the scenes.

"That's always a question I ask because of my approach," Greg agrees. "I don't go undercover; when I approach these groups I'm very upfront about who I am and what I do, so there's always a suspicion that I might only see part of what the reality is.

"But with someone like Wolf, I've got no doubts about his testimony because I've got to know him pretty well and we've developed a kind of deeper relationship. Raven, the vampire I met in the bar in New Orleans... I don't know. It was just an encounter in a vampire bar – we could have both been putting each other on, on some level, I suppose.

"But I did talk a bit to the vampire alliance in Atlanta. They have a PR campaign; they have material ready to give out so I know they're aggressively trying to improve their image.

"With Pendragon and the Brotherhood of Satan, I was with them for a weekend and I spent an awful lot of time with them – so I suspect what I saw was what was really happening; they didn't put on a show for the entire weekend just for me. I was there. I just sort of sat off to the side, and, you know..."

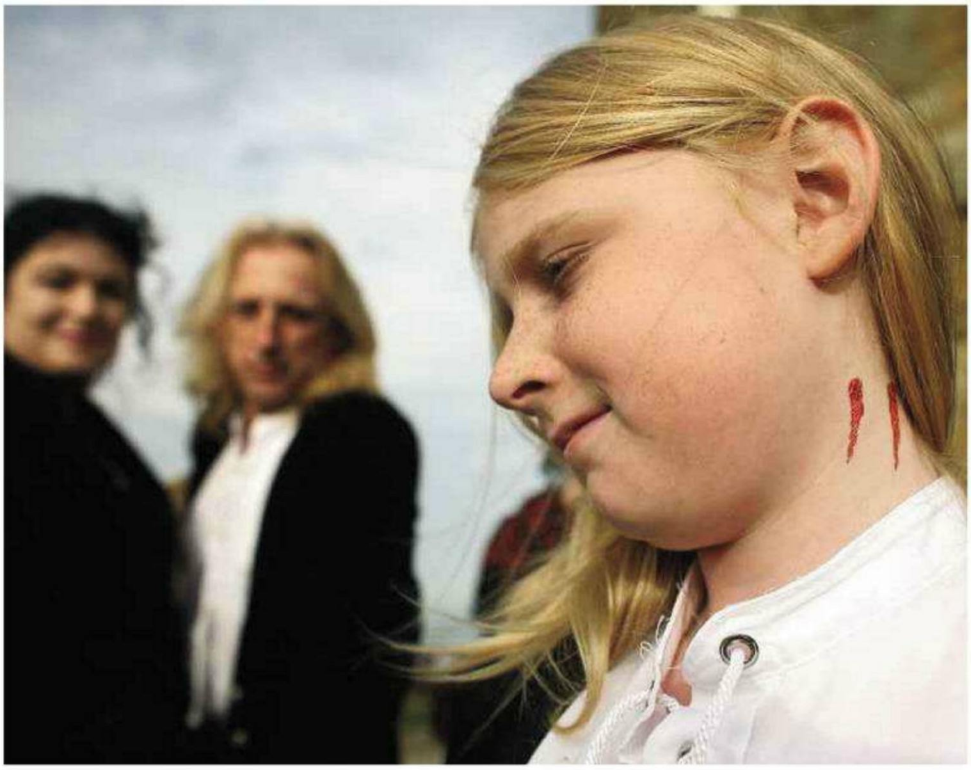
On the subject of access, I wonder whether Greg has been with Wolf at Full Moon. Sadly not, it turns out, although he suspects there might not be much to write to the Vatican about.

"While some 'therians' [those claiming close identification with animals, real or fictional, who 'shape-shift', to other forms] report that the phases of the Moon have some influence on shifting, many reject this notion," he says. "Some claim that the Moon has more influence on an inexperienced therian than one with more experience, who is more likely to be able to shift at will. Wolf Van Zandt, I believe, has indicated that his therian states tend to be influenced not by the Moon, but by large bodies of moving water."

Inevitably, there comes a point where one's disbelief is suspended by a thread. Many 'sanguine' (blood-drinking, rather than confident) vampires, feeling more than just a compulsion to drink blood, claim to have a biological *need* for blood; some even believe it hides in a vampire gene. But isn't this quite a straightforward, testable claim? Greg errs on the side of agnostic caution.

"I don't know if it's ever been tested by anyone, I'm not familiar with any medical condition that requires someone to consume fresh blood," he admits.

"I have to say that the sanguinarians – those who do say they need to consume blood in order to stay alive



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ABOVE: Blood-sucking freaks or just regular folks? Modern vampires are keen to dispel a few stereotypes.

– they're generally talking about just a very small amount. I was kind of amazed when I was reading some of the literature – you're talking about maybe the equivalent of a couple of raw steaks a month to maintain their health, so not huge amounts.

"It's hard for me to imagine the biological cause for that – maybe an iron deficiency or something. Some people seem compelled, and I'm not a scientist, or a medical doctor, so I don't want to say that they're completely wrong about what their claims are. Obviously, they *are* compelled for one reason or another to consume blood."

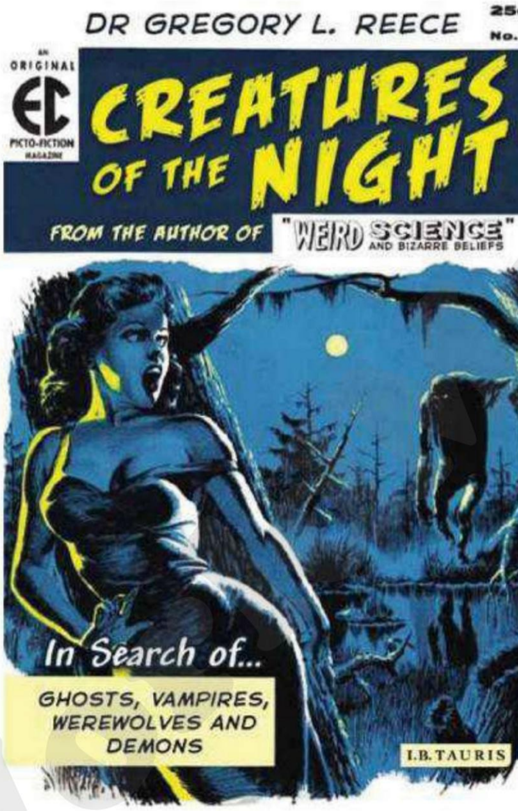
If pressed, Greg will admit that his scepticism has occasionally been pushed to outright suspicion. He recalls a tale from the days of *Weird Science*: "In an earlier book, I did some research into Bigfoot. I was with some people hunting Bigfoot, and there my scepticism was probably at its most extreme. I had an almost impossible time figuring out whether I was being put on by everyone involved or if everyone involved really believed.

"We found tracks of the Sasquatch within five minutes of my arriving on the scene and I immediately started thinking, 'Well, I'm being conned by the people who are running the show here. They've put the tracks here for me to find.'

"But people seemed to be so intense about it that I began to think, 'Well, maybe there's another explanation. Maybe the locals or somebody not affiliated with this group have planted it here to fool us all.'

"Then, of course, you have to admit, well, maybe it's a *real* track – although I was sceptical of that because of its pristine nature. There were only three tracks in a row and they were all of the right foot, so it looked like a plant to me."

'Real' vampires and werewolves are discovering themselves in increasing numbers nowadays, while Satanists and exorcists have come in and out of fashion. Greg's book frames these occult lifestyle choices in the context of man's understanding of horror in both the real and fictional worlds. Alongside a wealth of literary references, he also digs up Conan Doyle's spiritualist investigations, 18th-century reports of Eastern European vampire (or *oupire*) outbreaks (see 'Vampire Autopsies', pp44–48 this issue), werewolf hunts from 1521 and the 20th-century revival of exorcism.



Reece carefully and wryly withholds judgement on the empirical truth of these and other firsthand reports, except to occasionally question the reliability of the witness. However, I feel I must ask whether his giving equal weight to the study of fiction and to that which is clearly meant in earnest isn't making a subtle assumption about the latter?

"I would hope not," he says, "because I approached these eyewitness accounts with an open mind. I also believe very firmly – and if you look at the history of these concepts you will find this to be the case – that the fiction influences the firsthand accounts, and the firsthand accounts influence the fiction, so they have to be treated together; it's give and take.

"But whether it's ghosts or vampires or werewolves, they began with real accounts, with people telling stories of things that really happened to them, and only later did they become co-opted by fiction. At this point in the history of Western culture, fiction has had such a pervasive role that most of our firsthand accounts tend to be coloured by it.

"Take vampires, for example. I think people have really begun to identify with the myth that is associated with vampires in the Western tradition. Maybe pushing aside some of the Christian interpretation of vampires, but nevertheless latching onto a lot of the other Gothic imagery. I think people have found that to be a very persuasive model for governing their lives, and so they arrange their relationships around those models that they learn from vampire tradition, vampire fiction.

"Do I find it so compelling that I might organise my life in such a way? No, but I can appreciate those who do – it's a very powerful set of images that we have associated with the vampire, probably more so than any other creature that I talk about in the book. Religious imagery as well as sexual imagery, it's also pretty cool, dressing in black, living your life at night, there is a certain attraction to that."

Much of the academic direction for *Creatures of the Night* is provided by Rudolph Otto's writing, especially his 1917 book *Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy)*. Otto asserted that human experience of the divine was synonymous with our experience of the terrible, the entirely Other. Having studied him in the original German, Reece speaks of Otto as he might an old tutor.

"I worked a lot with Otto when I was in graduate school. One of the exams we had to pass in order to prove we had the ability to read and translate German was to translate passages of *Das Heilige*, so I've always had a place in my heart for Otto.

"It just seems he really captures

the sense of awe that is at the heart of many religious beliefs, and it struck me that what Otto had to say was readily adaptable to 21st-century culture."

This is a key theme of *Creatures of the Night*: aided by this band of ghouls and psychic crusaders, Reece suggests that at the root of religion is Otto's 'Mysterium Tremendum' (the dread-inspiring Other). Quoting Otto, he re-emphasises, "The essence of the 'soul' lies not in the imaginative or conceptual expression of it, but first and foremost in the fact that it is a spectre, that it arouses 'dread' or 'awe'."

When also considering the *Research into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (1871) by Edward Burnett Tylor, Reece declares: "…all ghosts are holy, for all gods were but ghosts in the ancient primitive heart of human history."

It's a broad claim, and I'm keen to test it. Greg notes that God spoke to Job through the tornado that had just carried his family away, and draws parallels with his own experience with tornados.

"At the heart of a lot of our concepts of God," says Reece, "especially in Western culture, but also in the East, is this notion of the awfulness, the sheer difference of the divine from the human, and the unpredictability of the divine.

"Living here in the southern United States, tornados are a near constant threat. After 2011, when they came very near to where I live and destroyed the homes of a lot of people I know, it became very real to me that this was a force beyond human comprehension, despite meteorological science as it stands today."

The ghouls featured in *Creatures of the Night* actually operate within a specifically Christian framework of the Universe. According to legend, almost all of them react in some way to Christian iconography. Demons, however, are a special case according to Reece. "Demons, unlike ghosts, vampires and werewolves, are accepted in the orthodox within the Western tradition; they are accepted before they are cast out."

Reading this, I'm thankful for being British; we aren't possessed by demons half as much as our American cousins, and it's considered quite unorthodox to exorcise demons in a parish church. I argue that, in Britain at least, a belief in ghosts is more often and more easily accepted into a traditional religious worldview than the literal existence of demons.

"That's probably true in the States as well," Reece responds. "But as far as I know they don't have a theological stamp of approval in the way that the existence of demons does. You don't often hear sermons from the pulpit or find theologians writing on the subject of ghosts, but there's always been a part of mainstream Christian theology that deals with the existence of demons."

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ABOVE: Zombie walks, like this one in Sydney, are all the rage – are they critiques of consumer culture?

These ghouls operate within a Christian framework

The demon, that mediæval meme, has survived the progression of Christian theology – shape-shifting through the imaginations of Milton, Goya, and Philip Pullman – and even now lurks just below the surface of the Christian mainstream. There is the obvious theatrical appeal of exorcism to Protestant evangelists and sure enough, the Catholic Church advises those in the thrall of a serious fiend to ring a priest and get him to ring a bishop.

There are, of course, other equally awful creatures of the night that didn't make the cut: the book's concern is perhaps more Christocentric and more otherworldly than to allow for the witch, the zombie or Frankenstein and his monster. In March this year, Greg presented a paper to the American Academy of Religion on the zombie apocalypse, and he gives another reason for their omission.

"I recently wrote a paper on the zombie apocalypse and I considered including zombies in this book. But zombies, unlike werewolves, vampires and demons, don't have a real-life component. Some people on the panel made some compelling arguments for the idea that one way of understanding the zombies is as a criticism of consumer culture (as in George Romero's movies); they were identifying zombies with the anti-financial sector movements in the States, the Occupy Wall Street movement…

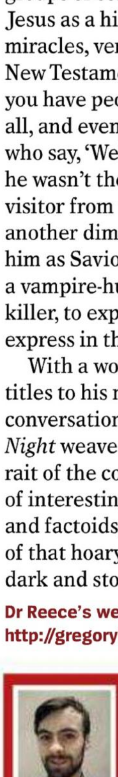
"But I'm not familiar with any community of people, except maybe in a very small way in the Haitian zombie culture, who claim there are shambling hordes of the undead, or who claim that they are real-life zombies."

Although not working on anything specific at the moment, Dr Reece has a few ideas "swimming around", including a look at images of Jesus in popular culture.

"It might tell us a great deal about ourselves, about how we think about the divine. On one level, you have groups of conservatives who treat Jesus as a historical figure who did the miracles, very much as described in the New Testament. At the other extreme, you have people denying he existed at all, and even more interesting are those who say, 'Well, yes, Jesus was real, but he wasn't the Son of God… he was a visitor from the planet Clarion' or from another dimension. When we think of him as Saviour today, do we make him a vampire-hunter, or maybe a zombie-killer, to express what we're trying to express in this idea of Jesus?"

With a wonderfully offbeat list of titles to his name, Dr Reece is a natural conversationalist, and *Creatures of the Night* weaves an engagingly dark portrait of the collective unconscious, full of interesting observations, references and factoids, including a potted history of that hoary Gothic opener "It was a dark and stormy night…" FT

Dr Reece's website: http://gregorylreece.com/



GEORGE BINNING is a freelance journalist and avid fortean, interested in geometry and cereology. He produces idiotic zines and is a 'prefect' at the Idler Academy. georgebinning.wordpress.com.

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VAMPIRE AUTOPSIES

Just as the Age of Reason was dawning, a sudden eruption of vampirism brought age-old folklore to the attention of the modern world. **Dr LEO RUICKBIE** recounts how doctors, philosophers and scholars

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In March 1732, there was news of a strange incident on the eastern borders of the sprawling Habsburg empire. Picked up by the *London Journal* and *The Gentleman's Magazine*, it was reported that "certain dead bodies, called Vampyres, had killed several persons by sucking out their blood" in a town named as "Medreyga", said to be in Hungary.[1] The same story also appeared in the Dutch, French and German newspapers, including the scientific periodical *Commercium litterarium*. John Polidori, Lord Byron's doctor and author of *The Vampyre*, would later call it a "curious and, of course, *credible* account",[2] so credible, in fact, that King Frederick Wilhelm I of Prussia ordered an investigation by the Royal Society of Science.

"DEAD BODIES HAD KILLED SEVERAL PERSONS BY SUCKING OUT THEIR BLOOD"

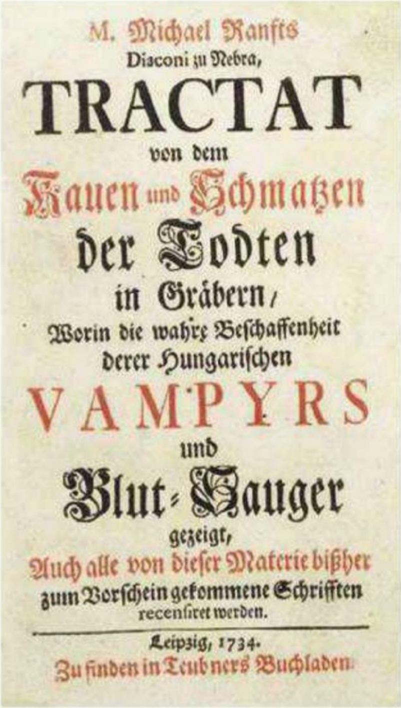
In France, Voltaire would later recall in his influential *Dictionnaire Philosophique* that: "Nothing was spoken of but vampires, from 1730 to 1735; they were laid in wait for, their hearts torn out and burnt" and "the more they were burnt, the more they abounded".[3] Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote to the Archbishop of Paris, saying: "If there is in the world one attested story it is that of the Vampires. Nothing is missing: *proces-verbaux*, certificates from Notabilities, Surgeons, Priests, Magistrates. The juridical proof is most complete."[4] Counterintuitively, it was the Age of Reason that provided the best evidence for the existence of the vampire. Modern medicine and folklore would meet face-to-face over its undead body and, astonishingly, would find themselves in agreement.

Voltaire was right to say that the early 1730s were abuzz with talk of vampires. Some 20 books, dissertations and articles appeared in the first year of the panic from 1732–1733. By 1734, Michael Ranft remarked that during Leipzig's last Easter fair "it was impossible to enter a bookshop without seeing something about bloodsuckers". He had written a book himself, on the "chewing dead", which was then being published in a new German edition.[5] The debate would eventually reach the Vatican and the royal courts of Europe. However, the case that had set everyone talking began some years earlier.

The Medveđa Outbreak

When a peasant fell off a haywagon and broke his neck in 1727, it was not just another agricultural accident. It was the beginning of a vampire epidemic that would bring the small village of Medveđa in Serbia to the notice of the world. Variously called Metwett, Medwedia, Medwegya and Medreyga, this was the village of Medveđa lying near Trstenik on the banks of the Zapadna Morava river. The peasant in question was a local *hajduk* (militiaman) named Arnond (sometimes given as Arnont or Arnold) Paole. Paole had returned to Medveđa from Turkish-controlled Serbia with strange stories of being attacked by a vampire near "Gassowa" (possibly Kosovo), but he calmed his neighbours by telling them that he had eaten earth from the vampire's grave and smeared himself with its blood as an antidote. About 20 or 30 days after his death, the villagers discovered that the antidote had not worked.

People started complaining that Paole had returned from the grave to torment them. Four people subsequently died. The local headman, who had experience of these matters, ordered them to dig up Paole. His body had not decomposed and fresh blood was seen to come out of eyes, nose and ears, his nails and skin had fallen off to be replaced by new growth. According to local custom, they pierced his heart with a stake, whereupon he uttered a loud cry. They burnt the remains to ashes. Because they believed that his victims would also become vampires, they similarly disposed of their bodies.


M. Michael Ranfts
Diaconi zu Nebra,
TRACTAT
von dem
Kauen und Schmatzen
der Todten
in Gräbern,
Worin die wahre Beſchaffenheit
derer Hungariſchen
VAMPYRS
und
Blut-Sauger
gezeigt,
Auch alle von dieſer Materie bißher
zum Vorſchein gekommene Schrifften
recenſiret werden.
Leipzig, 1734.
Zu finden in Teubners Buchladen.

LEFT: The title page of Michael Ranft's 1734 book on the "chewing dead".
BELOW: Voltaire, who noted that "nothing was spoken of but vampires" in the early 1730s.

Despite the destruction of Paole's corpse, vampirism returned to the village in the winter of 1731. In the short space of six weeks, 13 people died. This time, the matter was reported and, amid fears of plague, a specialist in contagious medicine called Glaser was dispatched from Paraćin to investigate. Glaser arrived on 12 December and conducted a house-to-house search. Although he found no evidence of infectious disease, he did find several of what the locals described as vampires. Villagers showed him the bodies of dead people who appeared fatter, younger and fresher than when they had been alive. He documented their names, ages, length of time since death, and the general opinion of the villagers. Glaser reported back to the commander at Jagodina, further down the Morava.[6]

In consequence, another commission was formed, comprising Johannes Flückinger, regimental surgeon to Baron Fürstenbusch's Infantry Regiment, JH Siegel, field surgeon to the "Morallischen Regiment" and Johann Friedrich Baumgarten, also of Fürstenbusch's Regiment. Travelling to Medveđa in early January, they met Captain Groschitz, *hadnack* (headman) of the village, who explained the current situation.[7]

Although Paole was now quite dead, some people had eaten the meat of livestock that he had reputedly attacked as a vampire. Within three months, 17 died, some without any apparent disease, in the short space of two to three days. The officers marched down to the cemetery and ordered the graves of the victims to be opened. Flückinger spread out his instruments and conducted a series of autopsies, which he carefully documented as follows:

1. Stana, female, 20, died in childbirth two months previously, found to be "complete and undecayed". After opening the body, fresh extravascular blood was found in the cavitate pectoris. The arteries and veins were filled with fluid blood and the inner organs appeared fresh and healthy. New nails were observed on one of her hands. Her child had been carelessly interred and consequently half-eaten by dogs, but was also considered to be a vampire.

2. Miliza, female, 60, buried 90 days previously, was found to be fat and healthy looking, more so, said those who had known her, than she had been in life. She had eaten the meat of sheep killed by vampires and was suspected of spreading the contagion further.

3. An unnamed child, eight days old, buried 90 days earlier, also vampiric.

4. An unnamed boy, 16, buried 9 weeks earlier, in the vampiric condition.

5. Joachim, male, 17, buried 8 weeks earlier, dissected and found to be vampiric.

6. Ruscha, female, age not recorded, buried 8 weeks, found to be full of fresh blood. Also her child, 18 days old, not listed separately.

7. An unnamed girl, 10, died two months previously, again "complete and undecayed" with much fresh blood.

8. An unnamed woman, age not recorded, died 7 weeks previously, and her 8-week-old child both found to be decomposed. It was noted that the earth and grave were like those of the vampires interred nearby.

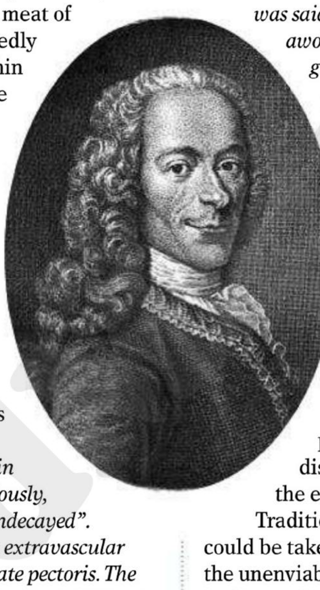
9. Rhade, male, 21 (or 23), a servant to a hajduk *corporal, died 5 weeks previously, completely decomposed.*

10. An unnamed woman, identified as the wife of the Bariactar, and her child, dead 5 weeks, similarly decomposed.

11. Stanche (or Stancko), male, 60, a hajduk, *dead 6 weeks, a profusion of liquid blood in the chest and heart, and similarly vampiric in other regards.*

12. Milloe (or Millove), male, 25, a hajduk, *and a vampire.*

13. Stanoicka (or Stanvicka), female, 22, daughter-in-law of the hajduk *Joviza, was still florid and healthy-looking with fresh blood coming from her nose. A great quantity of fresh blood was found in the chest and stomach. The body was not in the least decomposed. A bruise was noted under her ear, one finger long. It was said that, whilst still alive, she had awoken one night screaming and in great anguish, saying that Joviza's dead son Milloe had returned from the grave and tried to strangle her. Within days she was dead.*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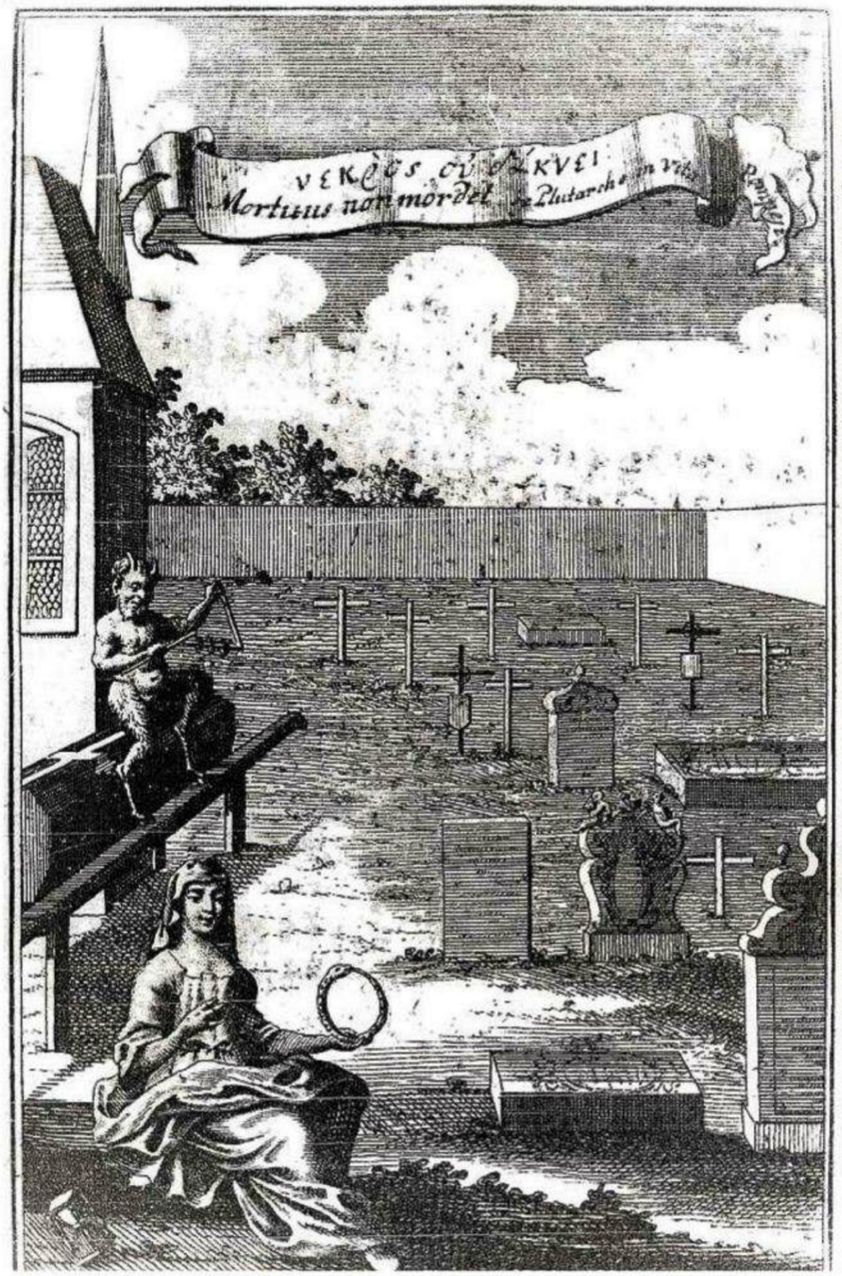
The attacks had been indiscriminate: seven women; five men; and five infants of unspecified sex. Several of them held positions of local importance, or were connected to those who did. Significantly, not all of the dead had become vampires themselves. Five of those disinterred were found to be in the expected state of decomposition.

Tradition was adhered to: no samples could be taken. Local gypsies were given the unenviable task of decapitating the bodies and burning the remains. The ashes were then scattered in the Morava river. The decomposed and hence non-vampiric bodies were reburied.

Flückinger's report, submitted as *Visum et Repertum* ("Seen and Reported"), was dated 7 January 1732. On 26 January 1732, it was counter-signed by Lieutenant Colonel (*Oberstleutnant*) Büttener and JH von Lindenfels of the Prinz Alexander Regiment in Belgrade as being in all regards truthful and accurate. Published in Nuremberg a few months after being submitted to the military authorities, *Visum et Repertum* became a bestseller.

The Kisolova Incident

The outbreak centring on Paole may have caught Europe's imagination, but it was not the first of the vampire autopsies carried out in the 18th century. Voltaire's source, and quite possibly Rousseau's as well, was the biblical scholar and leading Catholic theologian Dom Augustin Calmet (1672–1757). Calmet's reputation rested on a heavyweight 20-volume commentary on the Bible, but he had also alarmed French readers in 1746 by publishing *Dissertations sur les apparitions des anges, des démons et des esprits, et sur les revenants et vampires* ("Dissertations on the Apparitions of Angels, Demons, and Ghosts, and on the Revenants and Vampires"). It sold out quickly and was republished in a revised and expanded version in 1749 with another new edition following in 1751. An English translation appeared in 1759, cementing his reputation as one of the pioneers of vampire studies. Calmet had gathered together an impressive mass of stories; however, many of them were garbled and Calmet himself struggled to impose any sort of coherence on his material. One of his principal sources was the 1738 edition of the *Lettres Juives* ("Jewish Letters") of Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens, which had been rendered into English as *The Jewish Spy* in 1739. Styled as a series of letters between rabbis in various parts of the world, de Boyer's book drew on a number of newspaper accounts to tell the tale of the vampire epidemic. One of them was taken from the October 1736 edition of the *Mercure Historique et Politique*, but curiously told another story from the account it evidently referred to. What appeared to be an official report of the matter was first published in a Viennese periodical, the *Wienerisches Diarium* of 21 July 1725.[8]



ABOVE: Frontispiece from an edition of Michael Ranft's *De masticatione mortuorum in tumulis* or *Tractat von dem Kauen und Schmatzen der Todten in Gräbern* ("On the chewing and lip-smacking of the dead in their graves.").

Some time earlier that year, a man called Frombald, holding the important post of Imperial Provisor at Gradisk (Veliko Gradište) on the Habsburgs' 'Military Frontier', had received a deputation of villagers from "Kisolova" (modern Kisiljevo, in what is now the Republic of Serbia, about 200km / 125 miles north of Medveđa). The villagers were in a state of great alarm. One of their neighbours, a man by the name of Peter Plogojoviz, had died 10 weeks earlier and was buried according to local custom. However, Peter had come back.

According to his wife, he had knocked on the door and demanded his *opanki*, the traditional peasant footwear of the region. After she fled the village, other people started saying that they had seen Peter, too. And not just seen him. They said Peter visited them in the night and lay upon them with such force that they felt the life being squeezed out of them. In 24 hours they were dead. Within the space of eight days, nine people had died from Peter's nightly visits. The villagers knew exactly what he was: one of the "Vampyri", as Frombald carefully noted. To make sure, they wanted to exhume the body and look for the tell-tale signs – the body undecomposed, and the hair, beard and nails still growing – and they wanted the Imperial Provisor and a priest to be present. Frombald told them they would have to wait while he sent a request to his superiors in Belgrade. The villagers refused, threatening to leave the village *en masse* before the vampire could kill everyone. Frombald explained the necessity of waiting to them. He ordered them to wait. He no doubt shouted at them. But the Kisolovans were adamant. Frombald must have mulled the situation over carefully. Serbia had recently been snatched out of the jaws of the Ottoman Empire and the region remained politically tense. A deserted village in the Military Frontier could have repercussions, not least with his superiors. So it was that he found himself taking the road to Kisolova with the priest and an escort of villagers.

As they entered the village, they found that the body had already been dug up. Frombald lost no time in inspecting it:

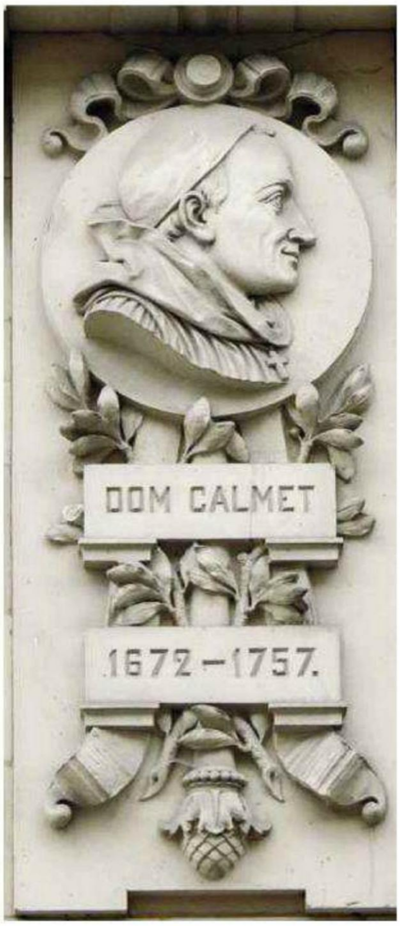
First, from the body and its grave there was not the slightest smell of death. The body, except the nose, which was fallen in, was very fresh. The hair and beard, also the nails, the old ones having fallen away, had grown on him. The old skin, which was somewhat whitish, had peeled off and a fresh new one had come out under it. The face, hands and also feet, and the whole body, were so recreated *that they, in his lifetime, could not have been more complete. In his mouth, not without surprise, did I see fresh blood, which, after the general opinion, he had sucked from those killed by him. In sum, all the indications were presented which these people (as already noted above) should themselves have.*

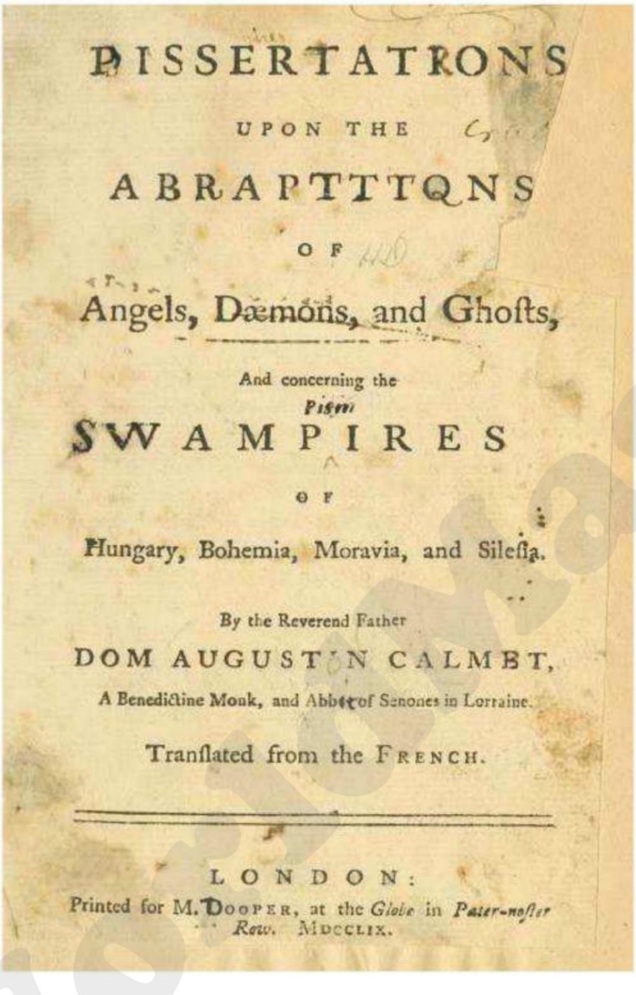
As Frombald and the priest observed the scene – the fresh earth around the grave, the extraordinary condition of the body – the villagers were already busy sharpening a stake. The wood of the hawthorn was said to be preferred. Forthwith, they drove it through the heart of the corpse. Frombald was aghast as fresh blood spurted from the corpse's ears and mouth, and the priest must have blushed at the "other wild signs" that Frombald declined to describe in his letter "out of high respect". The body was then burnt to ashes. Frombald was careful to point out that if any mistake had been made in this matter – the desecration of a grave and the summary execution of someone who may not have been quite dead, come to mind – then all blame should rest squarely on the fear-crazed peasants. Frombald's official and impartial testimony might be thought to carry considerable weight, but it was not until 1732 when it was rediscovered by German writers and added to the Medveđa story that it became more widely known.

The de Cabrera Investigation

Calmet related another case of about 1730 or before, located at what he called "the house of a Haidamaque peasant" somewhere vaguely "on the frontiers of Hungary".[9] This story was attributed to a certain "Comte de Cabreras", a captain in the "Alandetti regiment". However, there was no Cabreras of the Alandetti; an identification with Juan de Cabrera i Perellós of the Spanish noble family of Cabrera, serving in Anton Diego, Marquis D'Alcaudete's regiment seems possible.[10]

According to an unnamed source of Calmet's who had apparently heard it directly from de Cabrera in Freiburg im Breisgau in Germany in 1730, the captain had been detailed to investigate a report from a soldier billeted with a local family. The soldier had informed his superiors that his host had died suddenly after the arrival at dinner of the host's father who had been dead and buried for the last 10 years. Taking along some of his brother officers, a surgeon and an auditor, de Cabrera verified the soldier's tale and consequently had the body of the supposed revenant exhumed. It was, in Calmet's words, "found to be like that of a man who has just expired, and his blood like that of a living man". De Cabrera had the corpse decapitated and re-interred. Information regarding two more cases was forthcoming: a corpse laid in the ground for 30 years past had returned three times to suck the blood from his brother, one of his sons and a servant, all of whom subsequently died; another, dead for 16 years, had sucked the blood of two of his sons, causing death. De Cabrera had these bodies exhumed also. The first was again found with "blood in a fluid state, like that of a living person"; the condition of the second was not described. He ordered that a nail be driven through the temple of the first and that the second should be burnt. De Cabrera made his report and was despatched to carry it to Emperor Charles VI himself. The involvement of military personnel, including legal and medical officers, gives the story apparent authority, but at the present time it is unsubstantiated.





DISSERTATIONS

UPON THE

APPARITIONS

OF

Angels, Dæmons, and Ghoſts,

And concerning the

VAMPIRES

OF

Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, and Sileſia.

By the Reverend Father

DOM AUGUSTIN CALMET,

A Benedictine Monk, and Abbot of Senones in Lorraine.

Tranſlated from the FRENCH.

LONDON:

Printed for M. COOPER, at the *Globe* in *Pater-noſter Row.* MDCCLIX.

LEFT: Theologian and Bible scholar Dom Augustin Calmet and (below) his 1746 book *Dissertations sur les apparitions des anges, des démons et des esprits, et sur les revenants et vampires*.

The vampiric condition

The commercial success of Flückinger's report caused subsequent writers to trawl the history books for more examples of the chewing dead, murderous revenants and blood-sucking corpses. Calmet was expansive on the subject. Quoting extensively from recent literature, such as de Boyer's *Lettres Juives* and notably the events documented by Karl Ferdinand de Schertz in *Magia Posthuma*, he built up a picture of a widespread supernatural contagion stretching across eastern Europe:

In this present age and for about 60 years past, we have been the hearers and witnesses of a new series of extraordinary incidents and occurrences. Hungary, Moravia, Silesia, Poland, are the principal theatre of these happenings. For here we are told that dead men, men who have been dead for several months, I say, return from the tomb, are heard to speak, walk about, infest hamlets and villages, injure both men and animals, whose blood they drain thereby making them sick and ill, and at length actually causing death.[11]

Ultimately, however, he remained sceptical. However, this did little to abate the popular panic. Vampires had become a serious concern. Discussions between Cardinal Schrattembach, Bishop of Olmütz, and the Archbishop of Trani, later Cardinal, Giuseppe Davanzati, led to the latter's own dissertation on the subject – *I Vampiri* – written between 1738 and 1744. Widely circulated in manuscript,

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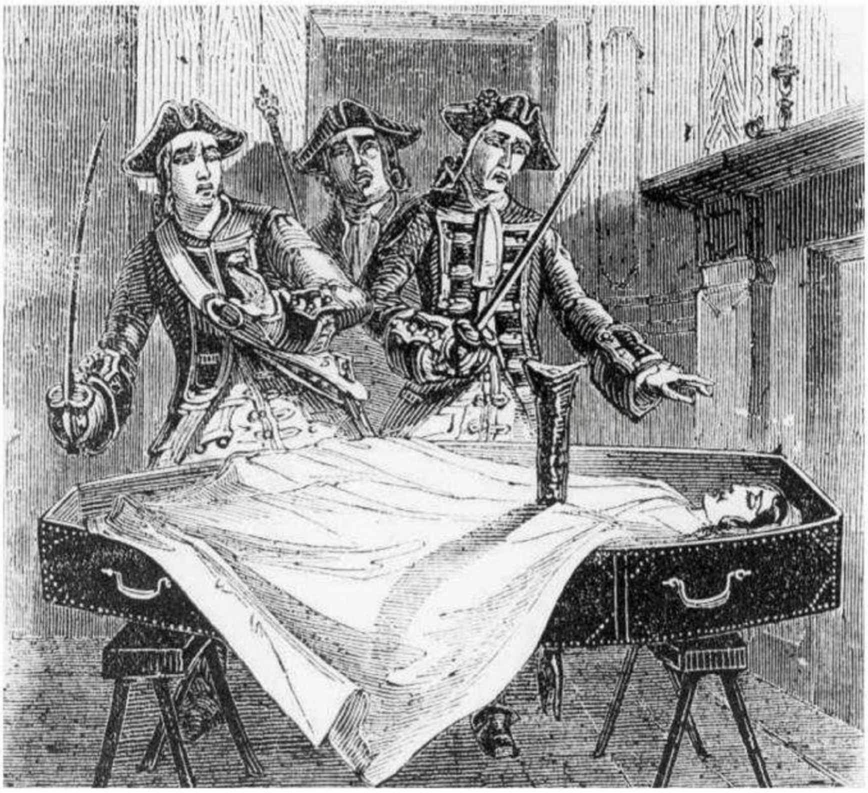

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

LEFT: 'The desecrated corpse' – staking a vampire, illustrated in the penny dreadful *Varney the Vampire, or the Feast of Blood*, ca. 1800.

Davanzati's work was read and praised by Pope Benedict XIV, swaying the pontiff to condemn the belief in vampires when he published on the matter in 1749.[12]

Calmet had corresponded with Maria Theresa (1717–1780), Empress of the Holy Roman Empire, who was concerned enough by the epidemic to have her personal physician Gerard van Swieten investigate the matter. When an incident in Hermersdorf near the Silesian-Moravian border was reported, van Swieten deputed two court doctors, Johannes Gasser and Christian Vabst, to investigate. The body of Rosina Polakin, being exhumed in January 1755 and found to be vampiric – undecomposed and with fluid blood in the veins – had been subjected to the traditional treatment with the added proviso of first being dragged through a hole in the cemetery wall. The Empress issued a proclamation (*Rescriptum*) in March that year prohibiting the staking and burning of corpses.[13]

The vampire had left the misty realms of folklore and entered scientific, legal and theological discourse. Independently reported, these cases unnervingly agreed upon the 'vampiric condition'. Taken together, they became an epidemic. The juridical proof was, as Rousseau said, complete. But nobody wanted to believe it was true. Not Rousseau, and certainly not the Church for whom the undead were an affront to the resurrection and blood-sucking a dangerous trespass on the Holy Sacraments. However, they could not escape the facts. But what were the facts?

Frombald, Glaser, Flückinger and de Cabrera (if we can include him) all reported an uncorrupted body apparently filled with fluid blood, sometimes looking 'healthier' than when alive and described as fresh, with 'new' skin and nails; these 'corpses' would attack the living, draining their vitality to the point of death. All of this was presented as fact; but is it possible that things were not as they seemed?

The condition of Plogojoviz's body seemed abnormal, probably paranormal, to the villagers, and even to the Imperial Provisor and the regimental surgeon. But modern medicine has discovered that many of the traditional signs of vampirism are in fact part of the natural process of decomposition. When Frombald and Flückinger saw that the 'old' skin of the vampires had fallen away and had been replaced by a 'new' one, they were not entirely wrong. They had only incorrectly interpreted what we today recognise as 'skin slippage', the process by which the epidermis comes away from the dermis. The 'new' nails observed were probably simply the nail beds themselves. The full and 'healthy' appearance was caused by gases released during decomposition which bloat the body; hence the old woman who looked better fed than when alive. The florid or ruddy appearance can result from livor mortis (lividity) as the tissues become saturated with blood. The presence of 'fresh' – that is, liquid – blood is also possible: although blood normally coagulates at death, decomposition can cause it to liquefy again. The presence of blood in and around the mouth, taken as a sign of the vampire having sucked blood from the living, is caused by gas putting pressure on the lungs and so forcing blood up into the mouth and nose. The terrible cry of agony uttered by the vampire Paole upon staking is likewise explained by gases formed by decomposition. The impact of the stake on the chest cavity forces these up the throat and past the glottis to make a surprisingly lifelike sound.

However, for all our medical advances we are still left with some untidy, indeed disturbing, anomalies. What of the alleged sightings of the dead? What of the people who supposedly died after being visited by Plogojoviz, Paole and the rest? What of the marks on Stanvicka's neck? The 'vampiric condition' of the body can be explained by science – but what of the vampiric condition of the spirit?

A version of this article was given at the conference 'Vampires: Myths of the Past and of the Future', Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of London, 3 November 2011.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dr LEO RUICKBIE holds a PhD from King's College, London, for his research on contemporary witchcraft and magic. He is the author of several books, most recently *A Brief Guide to the Supernatural* (Robinson, 2012), and also runs www.witchology.com.

Notes

1 *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. II, March, 1732, p681; and discussion, May, 1732 pp750f; 755f.

2 John William Polidori: Introduction to *The Vampyre: A Tale*, Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1819, p.*xx*.

3 Voltaire: *Dictionnaire Philosophique* [1764], in *Oeuvres Complétes de Voltaire*, vol.32, P.F. Dupont Fils, Paris, 1819, p756.

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5 Michael Ranft: *De Masticatione Mortuorum in Tumulis*, August Martin, Leipzig, 1725, exp. ed. 1728, with a German edition, *Tractact von dem Kauen und Schmatzen der Todten in Gräbern*, Teubner, Leipzig, 1734, quot. p178.

6 Glaser's report was published in *Commercium litterarium ad rei medicæ et scientiæ naturalis* […], Societas Litteris Jo. Ernest Adelbulneri, Nuremberg, 1732, pp82–3.

7 This account comes from *Visum et Repertum über die sogenannten Vampirs oder Blut-Aussauger*, Schmidt, Nuremberg, 1732, which was also widely reprinted with a number of transcription errors being introduced, notably regarding the names of the people and places described.

8 "Copia eines Schreibens aus dem Gradisker District", *Wienerisches Diarium* 58, 21 July 1725, pp11–12, from which the following quotations are taken, my translation.

9 Found in Calmet: *Dissertations*, p277, and Calmet: *Phantom World*, pp33–4.

10 Javier Arries: "El comte de Cabrera: Un caçador de vampirs valnecià a l'Hongria del segle XVIII", *L'Upir* 21, vol. 3, July–September 2009, pp41–9.

11 Calmet: *The Phantom World*, trans. Henry Christmas, A Hart, Philadelphia, 1850, pp233–4.

12 Davanzati: *Dissertazione sopra I Vampiri*, Naples, MS of 1744, published 1774; Benedict XIV: *De servorum Dei beatificatione et Beatorum canonizatione*, 2nd ed. Manfré, Patavii, 1749.

13 Gerard van Swieten: "Remarques sur le Vampyrisme de Sylesie de l'an 1755", ONB Vienna, 7237 PI, with a later German publication, *Abhandlung des Daseyns der Gespenster, nebst einem Anhange vom Vampyrismus*, trans. Andreas Ulrich Mayer, Augsburg: n.p., 1768, from which I cite the Polakin case, p192.

- For the connection between vampire belief and tuberculosis, see "Consumed by vampires" by Paul Sieveking, **FT80:46–47**.

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THE MEN WHO INVENTED DRACULA

JOHN FRASER TELLS THE STORY OF TWO MEN FROM THE MINISTRY WHO MANAGED TO PUT THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS FICTIONAL VAMPIRE ON THE TOURIST MAP IN CEAUSESCU'S ROMANIA.

Nicolæ Paduraru left this world on 4 May 2009 after a courageous battle against cancer; by a sad coincidence, this was just two months after his longstanding colleague 'Baron' Alexander Misiuga died of a heart attack on his 83rd birthday. The timing of their deaths, however, was far less strange than many of the events in their lives, as these two former members of the Romanian Tourist Ministry in the Communist era had managed to conjure travel destinations out of places that didn't really exist. Their creation has become a wonderfully manufactured anomaly that has fascinated thousands over the last few decades; just possibly, it has even given birth to one or two genuinely paranormal twists.

When Bram Stoker (pictured right) wrote his seminal vampire novel *Dracula*, he undoubtedly took the name – and some of the traits – of his titular character from Vlad Dracula, the ruthless 15th-century prince of Wallachia, one of the regions that now makes up Romania (see **FT257:34–41**). Vlad also had the nickname 'Vlad Tepes', or 'the Impaler', due to the fact that he was known to impale his enemies on wooden stakes in what we might now describe as a type of basic psychological warfare.

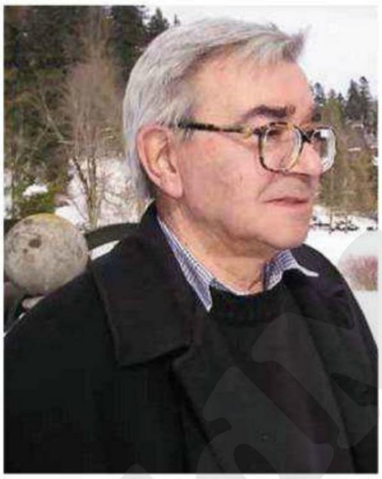
HE WANTED A THREE-STOREY HOTEL IN THE STYLE OF A GOTHIC CASTLE

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

But the use of wooden stakes was also believed to be a 'genuine' way of killing vampires – and other dead whose souls might prove restless – throughout much of mediæval Europe. In fact, it was only as late as 1823 that England outlawed the act of driving stakes through the hearts of suicides. These accidental yet fortuitous similarities led Stoker to use the name of Dracula for the vampire character in his book. He had, however, never travelled to the region and made some imaginative choices when it came to the details of geography. Vlad Dracula was actually the Prince of Wallachia, a state neighbouring Transylvania; but perhaps because folklore of actual vampires (known locally as *strigoi*) was more prevalent in Transylvania, Dracula and his castle were moved, wholesale, across the border. The craggy cliff face of Poenari Castle where Vlad had really lived became the entirely fictional Castle Dracula on the Borgo Pass; which, despite its foreboding name, consists of impressive but rather more gently rolling hills. This was Stoker's prerogative, of course; it was, after all, only fiction…

Almost a century later, at the turn of the 1980s, our two members of the Romanian Tourist Ministry had become both perplexed and fascinated by the increasing tendency of foreign visitors to their

ABOVE: A statue of Vlad Dracula in Sighişoara, the town where the Impaler was born. **BELOW:** Nicolae Paduraru (left) and 'Baron' Alexander Misiuga (right).



ABOVE: GETTY IMAGES / DAVID GREEDY

country who expressed a desire to visit such nonexistent places as a castle on the Borgo Pass and an Inn in Bistrata called 'The Golden Crown' (where Jonathan Harker, the hero of the novel, was meant to have stayed). Under the Communist regime of Nicolæ Ceausescu, Stoker's *Dracula* was banned, and yet the enthusiasm and sincerity of these seekers after the unknown and unreal captured the imagination in particular of Alexander Misiuga, the Director of Culture in Bistrita. There is a modern Romanian legend that Misiuga caught the Communist dictator Ceausescu in a mellow mood after a good day's bear hunting and a hearty meal, and quietly and calmly suggested that a grand three-tower hotel should be built in the style of a gothic ruined castle on a sparsely inhabited Borgo Pass; and, yes, it needed dungeons as well! Not only did Misiuga survive this meeting, he got at least a substantial part of what he asked for. A Castle Dracula Hotel was begun in 1983, in a slightly more 'civilised' style that he had originally envisaged – however, it did come complete with dungeons, just as he'd requested. A lucky bonus was a real graveyard, as family burial grounds are quite common in that remote region, and a further twist was that the site he was given faced a nunnery. A 'Golden Crown' hotel was also built in Bistrita, despite the fact that names with royal connotations would have been frowned upon in such a strictly Communist society. Both buildings had enough success in tourist terms to maintain Misiuga's credibility, and he was to use their splendid kitsch to thrive on the novel he loved for the next three decades.

While the self-styled Baron Misiuga had undoubtedly put the building blocks of this strange project in place, it was another

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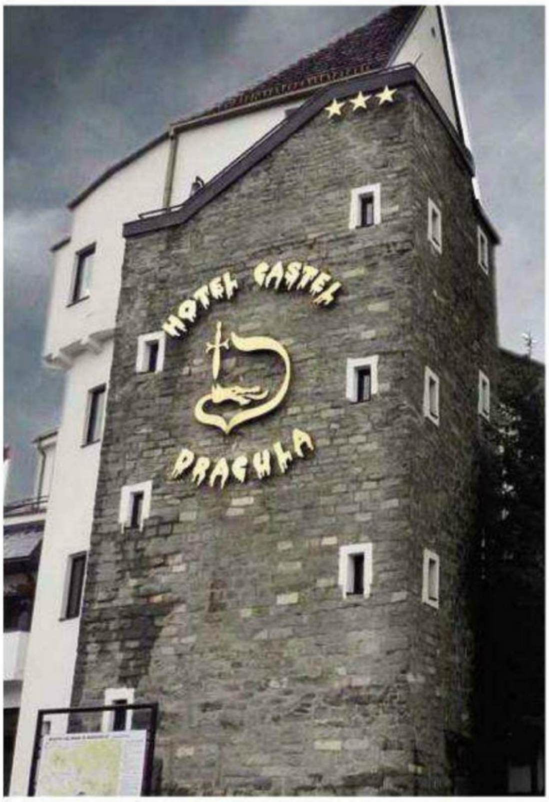
man from the Ministry, Nicolæ Paduraru, who truly immersed himself in the world of both the real Vlad Dracula (something of a 'King Arthur' figure in Romania today) and his blood-sucking fictional counterpart. He also faced a continual battle to educate tourists as to the differences between the two.

Paduraru was a fascinating man, whom I met many times. As somebody who had spent most of his adult life under Communism, he did not give the impression of being deeply religious, but definitely believed in something 'unknown'. He had, for instance, a wonderful habit of addressing stray dogs as 'Sir'. Whether this was part of his tour guide persona, or evidence of a genuine belief in reincarnation, I was never quite sure. He first developed tours during the 1980s showing the 'real' Vlad Dracula sites in Wallachia (such as the majestic ruin of Poenari Castle) and the 'unreal' Dracula sites which the 'Baron' was cleverly developing. During these initial tours, he gradually came to the conclusion that Dracula the vampire was better presented as a mysterious figure, rather than a clichéd monster jumping out of a coffin and dripping tomato ketchup. On arrival at any site, he would invariably remind tourists in his gruff, commanding voice that *"The Count may in fact be with us in disguise"*. After a couple of glasses of wine, you could well find yourself studying the faces of strangers and wondering if it were true. The carefully crafted talks he gave on the drive up the rolling hills to the Borgo Pass could make the whole place feel just as atmospheric and scary as the craggy cliff faces of Bram Stoker's novel.



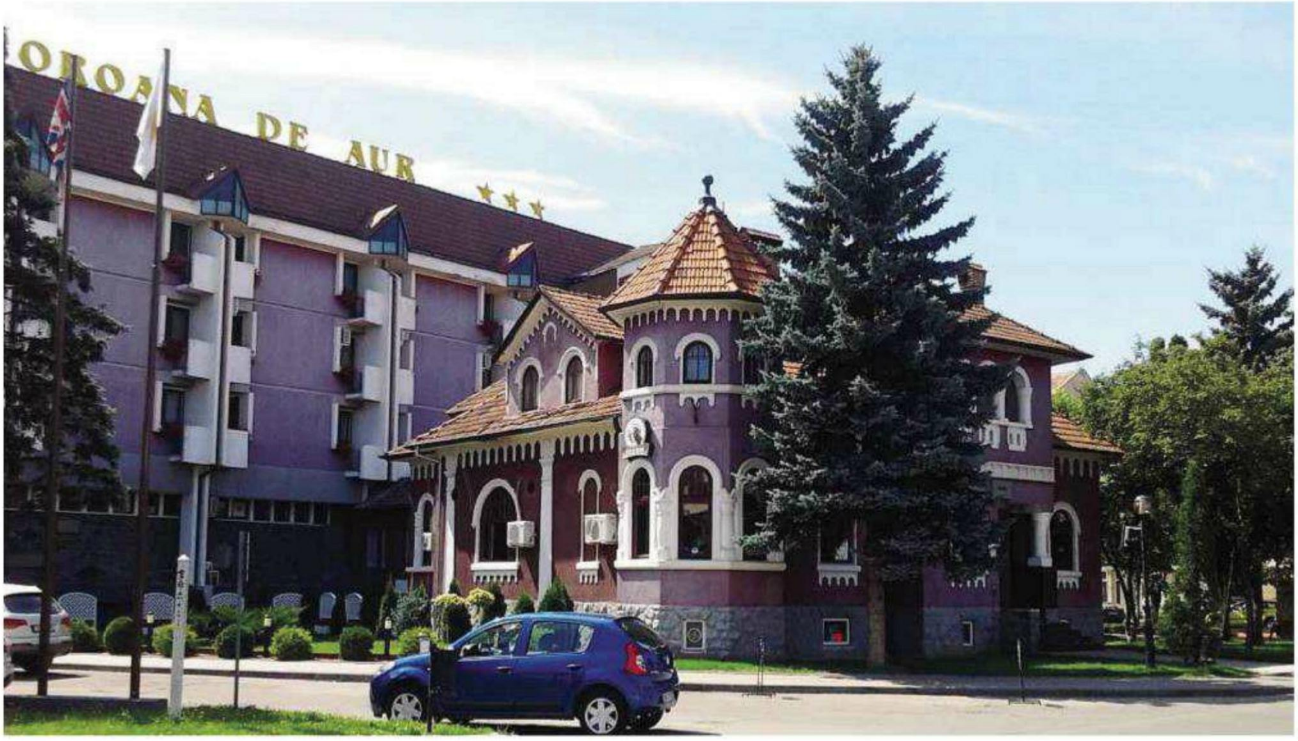
LEFT AND BELOW: Two of 'Baron' Misiuga's creations – the Hotel Castle Dracula in the Borgo Pass and the 'Golden Crown Inn' in Bistrita, where Stoker's Jonathan Harker stayed.

> "THE COUNT MAY IN FACT BE WITH US IN DISGUISE," HE WOULD SAY

It was following the fall of Communism in 1989 that Paduraru got the freedom to fully explore the subject of Dracula and his own beliefs. In 1991, he set up the Transylvanian Society of Dracula (TSD), consisting of writers, folklorists, paranormal researchers, historians, and incurable romantics. The tours and seminars of the Society also started to develop a genuine paranormal edge, visiting 'Wise Women' among the local peasantry and organising talks with Romanian University-based scholars with sidelines in the investigation of Kirlian photography, UFOs and other aspects of the unexplained. Such open-mindedness to the paranormal by academics is rather different from the situation in most British universities. He continued the 'lighter touch' tourist tours under the related banner of The Company of Mysterious Journeys. Later, he would work with the specialist British tour group Solos for several years, bringing in the unique concept of Dracula Tours for single people – something he often said the count would definitely approve of!

The finest achievement of the TSD came in 1995 when it created the first World Dracula Congress, organising more than 300 delegates from all over the world swapping ideas and thoughts on the real and the fictional Dracula. This helped set up a network of contacts worldwide, most of which still exist today. A second congress was also to follow in the year 2000 (**FT139:48**), which I attended as part of a Ghost Club delegation from the UK.

By then, of course, other Romanian tourist organisations were attempting to grasp the Dracula Dollar with varying levels of sophistication. An addictively kitsch 'Club Dracula' in Bucharest was opened. It serves a menu of (deliberately) revolting-sounding food in a windowless Gothic club



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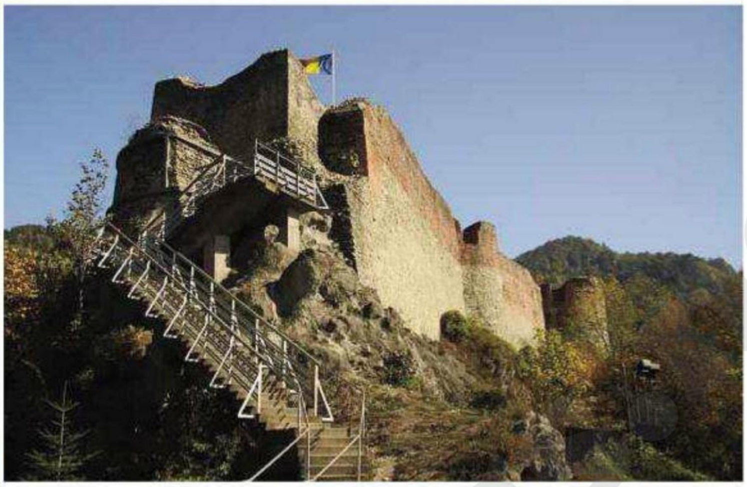

TOP: The road to the Borgo Pass. **ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT:** Two views of Castle Poenari – the real Castle Dracula, and haunted to boot.

combined with frequent visits by an actor with pointed teeth. This is all harmless fun; which is more than can be said for the misguided efforts in the early part of the new millennium by the Romanian government to build a 'Dracula Land'. This was a theme park they were convinced the world would flock to, to be built within sight of the ancient city of Sighișoara, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the birthplace of Vlad Dracula. Paduraru lobbied tirelessly against this project, which, thankfully, was eventually dropped after generating much bad publicity. I often felt that, deep down, Nicolæ would have wanted to extend his research further into the world of the 'real', rather than fictional, paranormal; unfortunately, due to his illness and eventual death, this was something that he never fully explored.

And if you do want to visit a site of reputedly genuine paranormal activity in Romania, it's not to the site of Stoker's fictional Castle Dracula that you should venture, but to the breathtaking cliff-top ruins of Poenari Castle, where Vlad Dracula made his last stand against the Turks and where the Impaler is said still to stalk the ramparts in the dead of night. Despite the 1,500-step climb to the top, its atmosphere alone makes Poenari a must-visit destination for anyone interested in visiting haunted sites. Ironically, it's a place that would still be unknown to the world if it wasn't for our men from the Romanian Tourist Ministry, a pair of pioneers who re-invented both Draculas for a world hungry for the strange and scary blend of fact and fiction.

And if you should decide to travel to these sites, with their blend of fact and fiction, it's just possible that you'll find Nicolæ Padurara and 'Baron' Misiuga attending your needs... suitably disguised, of course, just like their beloved Count. FT

The Company of Mysterious Journeys: www.mysteriousjourneys.com

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

JOHN FRASER has been actively interested in the paranormal and folklore for two decades. He is currently on the Council of the Society for Psychical Research and has previously been Vice Chair (Investigations) for the Ghost Club. He has visited Romania on many occasions and is a member of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula. John is also author of *Ghost-Hunting: a Survivors' Guide* (History Press, 2010).

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The Locked Room mysteries

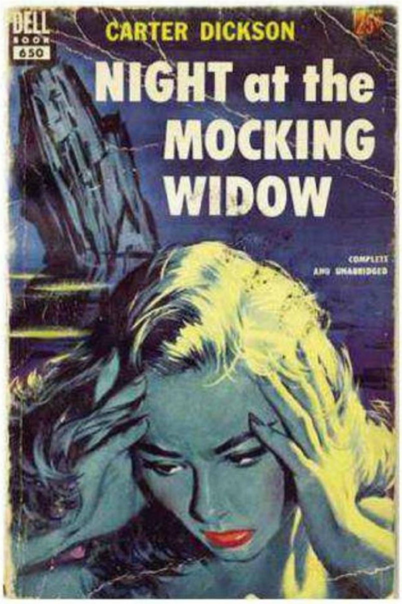
ANDREW MAY ponders the fortean obfuscations employed by classic murder mystery author John Dickson Carr.

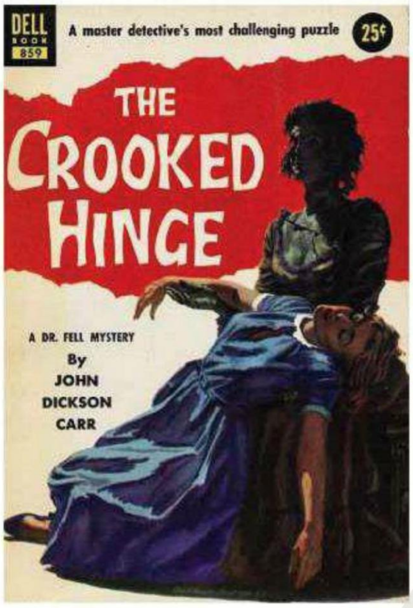
ANDREW MAY is a former scientist living in the south-west of England. He has a lifelong interest in forteana, pulp fiction, metaphysics and anything weird or mysterious.

John Dickson Carr was a prolific crime novelist who specialised in the Locked Room murder mystery. Other writers have tried their hands at the genre, but Carr was its undisputed master. Not all his novels have a literal 'locked room', but they all involve a seemingly impossible murder – one that requires immense ingenuity to solve. Fortunately, there is always someone on hand who is up to the task: someone like the larger-than-life Dr Gideon Fell, who was loosely based on GK Chesterton, or (when Carr was using the pseudonym of Carter Dickson) the equally large Sir Henry Merrivale – modelled on Sherlock Holmes's sedentary brother Mycroft.

Carr belonged to the 'fair play' school of mystery writing, where readers are presented squarely with the facts and only have themselves to blame if they fail to deduce the identity of the murderer and his (or often her) *modus operandi.* This style of writing was particularly popular during the 1930s and 40s, when most of Carr's work appeared. In contrast to the 'hard-boiled' American writers, the fair play school is chiefly associated with British authors such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L Sayers (and many others, now forgotten). Carr, however, was an American – although he lived in England from 1932 to 1948, had an English wife, and set most of his novels in Britain.

The concept of a 'fair play' mystery seems at first to be a contradiction. How do you sustain a novel-length mystery if you are forced to play fair with the reader? The answer lies in a mixture of misdirection and obfuscation – and Carr was a master of both. The precisely worded and factually accurate footnotes in *The Reader is Warned*, while ostensibly helping the reader to stay on the right track, are carefully designed to have the opposite effect. But active misdirection of this type has to be used sparingly, or else the reader will get wise to it. Not so with obfuscation: the more you can tie the reader up with irrelevant details the better. In Carr's case, obfuscation often meant the throwing-in of numerous fortean topics.





TOP AND ABOVE: Books by John Dickson Carr and the man himself.

Sometimes the fortean element is just a hook to pull the reader into the mystery – for example, the fake clairvoyant in *Till Death Do Us Part*, the ghost sightings in *The Case of the Constant Suicides*, the Egyptian curse in *Lord of the Sorcerers* or the tarot card in *The Eight of Swords.* In other cases, the fortean thread runs right through the novel: the vampire legend in *He Who Whispers*, telepathic demonstrations in *The Reader is Warned*, reincarnation in *The Burning Court*, and a mish-mash of ghosts, exorcisms and spiritualism in *The Plague Court Murders.* One novel, *The Night at the Mocking Widow*, even has an *FT*-style simulacrum looming over it from start to finish. The 'Mocking Widow' of the title is a huge natural outcrop of rock in vaguely human form: "This stone figure, 40 feet [12m] high, 38 feet [11.6m] round the base and eight feet [2.4m] round the head, stands in an open meadow below the High Street… The eyes are each large enough to contain a human head. A visitor in the lower High Street, looking north-eastwards, can easily discern that look of mockery and cruelty which has given the figure its name."

One of Carr's most fortean novels is *The Crooked Hinge*, featuring – among other things – a 17th-century mechanical robot and numerous hints of witchcraft and/or devil worship. Carr did his research well; he offers a plausible explanation for the Witches' Sabbath as a hallucination brought on by an ointment containing aconite and belladonna (cf. **FT173:15**). But, even here, the fortean element is pure obfuscation, which is ultimately irrelevant to the solution of the mystery. Carr's novels always end with a rational and down-to-earth explanation: there is no place in his world for the truly supernatural (except – as glimpsed in the epilogue to *The Burning Court* – in the mind of someone brought up since childhood to believe in it).

If the supernatural is ruled out, how then do you solve the mystery of the Locked Room? Carr came up with a seemingly endless string of answers, each as ingenious as the last. His best-known novel (though not the best-written) is *The Hollow Man*, which owes its reputation partly to its own fiendishly intricate solution, and partly to a chapter-long lecture on Locked Room theory delivered by Dr Fell. The secret, according to Fell, is to flirt with the improbable while never sinking into the impossible. In his bubbling enthusiasm to get this point across, Fell briefly breaks through the fourth wall: "We're in a detective story, and we don't fool the reader by pretending we're not." FT

An epidemic of mass hysteria

Following the recent outbreak of 'mass hysteria' in a New York state school, sociologist **Dr ROBERT BARTHOLOMEW** predicts that Western countries may be on the verge of an epidemic of such 'social panics'.

ROBERT BARTHOLOMEW is a New Yorker with a doctorate in sociology and wrote *Outbreak! The Encyclopedia of Extraordinary Social Behavior*, with Hilary Evans. He now teaches history at Botany Downs Secondary College, Auckland, New Zealand.

Earlier this year, in January 2012, a neurologist treating several girls from the same high school in Western New York publicly revealed his diagnosis – conversion disorder, aka 'mass hysteria' – to explain the appearance of twitching, facial tics and garbled speech (see **FT287:8–9**). While the announcement prompted a public outcry, it is almost certainly correct. What's more, there are signs that similar outbreaks may soon become commonplace.

Mass hysteria is one of the most misunderstood disorders of our time. News accounts that discuss outbreaks rarely do the subject justice and readers are usually left with more questions than answers. Why? It's complicated. Meowing nuns, barking schoolgirls, twitching epidemics, fainting cheerleaders and collapsing marching bands are just a few of the strange forms of collective behaviour that have been recorded over the years (see **FT253:30–37**). Before we begin our journey, given the misinformation that exists on this topic, it is important to get a few things straight.

There are several types of mass hysteria. The most common in Western countries involves the sudden appearance of a stressor, most often a bad or unusual smell. Group members suffer what is, essentially, a collective panic attack; shaking, over-breathing, dizziness, fainting and headaches are common. Most victims recover within a few hours. There is no pre-existing tension.

The second type will be more familiar to the readers of *FT*. When a group of people are under long-term stress in a captive environment, pent-up anxiety can disrupt the function of nerves or neurons which send messages to muscles and brain. Common symptoms include bouts of uncontrollable laughing, weeping, twitching, shaking, difficulty speaking or walking, and trance states. Outbreaks usually appear gradually over weeks or months and take a similar period to subside. Examples include outbreaks of 'Laughing Mania' in Africa, ghost scares in India and demonic possession in Malaysia. Dozens of cases are reported annually, most often in developing countries, in groups of schoolchildren who are under extreme stress. Once the symptoms appear in the first student, they may quickly spread to classmates who, typically, attribute the cause to witchcraft or evil spirits.[1]

BFI / WARNER BROS

ABOVE: Ken Russell's *The Devils* (1971) was based on a real case of mass hysteria at a convent in Loudun, France, in the 17th century.

FACING PAGE: Le Roy High School in New York State was the scene of a recent mass hysteria outbreak.

Classmates typically attribute the cause to witchcraft

Over the past three decades, I have collected hundreds of cases of mass hysteria in schools. Then in 2004, something strange happened. I recall thinking to myself, "This is odd." It was a case from the *Archives of Neurology* describing an outbreak of seizures among 10 girls at a school in North Carolina.[2] The girls experienced fainting, headaches, light-headedness, muscle-twitching and jerking, tingling, and numbness. The strange feature was that it rarely occurred in class, but to students in the hallway between classes, in the cafeteria, or in the schoolyard, and victims were spread throughout the school rather than being confined to a single class.

In 2007, another odd case popped up. A group of schoolgirls at William Byrd High School in Virginia were having bouts of twitching arms and legs,

LE ROY
JR/SR HIGH SCHOOL

headaches and light-headedness. News reports indicated that nine girls and a female teacher who were stricken were scattered throughout the school and did not belong to a single group or class. The outbreak coincided with warnings about a drug-resistant 'Golden Staph' infection that was responsible for the death of an area resident, and intense publicity about the mass shooting of students at Virginia Tech University.[3]

Then, in October 2011, several girls at a school in the small town of Le Roy, NY (pop. 7,641), developed facial tics and muscle twitching. The illness was alarming, as many of the girls were unable to complete a single sentence before blurting out gibberish. By early January 2012, the State Health Department announced that they knew the cause but could not reveal it for privacy reasons; and that there was nothing to worry about. Instead of calming matters, the statement caused pandemonium and widespread fear that the Department was covering up the existence of a mystery illness. In an effort to stem the panic and the ensuing media storm, a neurologist treating the students – by now, 18 girls and one boy – revealed that it was "mass hysteria".

When I began looking into this case, I noticed another oddity: again, many of the stricken students were scattered across the school and were not from the same class or single close-knit group. What does it all mean?

In searching through the literature on mass hysteria, outbreaks affecting motor function are very rare in Western countries. In fact, there are just three known school cases in the US during the 20th century.

In 1939, an epidemic of leg-twitching erupted at a school in Bellevue, Louisiana, after a girl who feared that her boyfriend would leave her if he saw that she was a poor dancer began to twitch and was excused from dance classes. Scientists believe the symptoms spread to six other girls in a subconscious fashion when they saw the attention given to the first girl and the rekindled affections of her boyfriend.[4]

In 1962, blackout spells swept through another Louisiana school where a student fell pregnant, amid rumours that girls were going to be given pregnancy tests, and anyone found pregnant would be sent to reform school.[5]

In 1976, 15 girls at a school in Mount Pleasant, Mississippi, began to collapse, shake and experience strange visions. One of the girls screamed: "Don't let it get me!" or "Get it off!" before passing out. Attacks lasted up to 15 minutes. Tests for drugs and other ailments were negative, and authorities concluded that it was hysteria triggered by a schoolgirl rivalry over the affections of a boy, and rumours that some of the affected girls had been hexed by a Voodoo curse.[6]

Mass hysteria is spread by sight and sound. This was true 400 years ago in mediæval European convents when cloistered nuns would tear off their clothing and begin to twitch, convulse and yell out blasphemies, and it is true today. This axiom is a cornerstone of the hysteria literature. The Internet and the new social media networks are extensions of our ears and eyes and bring people closer together like never before. Rapid advances in affordable telecommunications coupled with Twitter, Facebook and an array of other social networking sites have created an unprecedented degree of intimacy.

The girls at Le Roy, those in Virginia in 2007 and in North Carolina in 2002, are children of the 21st century. Throughout the entire 20th century, the US had just three recorded outbreaks of motor hysteria in schools, yet we have already witnessed three episodes in the past decade. I am convinced that this state of affairs is significant and serious. This appears to be a historic moment in the history of mass hysteria, where the primary agent responsible for spreading symptoms appears to be the Internet and social networking sites. The genie is out of the bottle and there is no looking back. Social networking and the social communications revolution are here to stay.

If this is true, brace yourself for many more cases of this type in the coming years. Text your friends. Spread the word on Twitter. Post it on Facebook. With motor hysteria disrupting signals to the muscles and brain, readers of *Fortean Times* should be in for some strange outbreaks in the coming years. Motor hysteria has been responsible for some of the strangest episodes of collective behaviours on record. The content of these episodes will reflect the social and cultural milieu. During the Middle Ages, there were numerous outbreaks of nuns meowing like cats, barking like dogs and bleating like sheep. At the time, these animals were considered to be the familiars of witches and devils, hence the content of their trances reflected prevailing beliefs. If Charles Fort were alive today, he would be sharpening his scissors; for, if I am right, we are going to be in for some strange times ahead. FT

NOTES

[1] RE Bartholomew & F Sirois: "Epidemic Hysteria in Schools: An International and Historical Overview", *Educational Studies*, 1996, 22(3):285–11; H Evans & R Bartholomew: *Outbreak! The Encyclopedia of Extraordinary Social Behavior*, Anomaly, New York, 2009.

[2] E Steven Roach & Ricky L Langley: "Episodic Neurological Dysfunction Due to Mass Hysteria", *Archives of Neurology* 61(8):1269–72, Aug 2004.

[3] David Harrison: "Expert: Mystery Illness is Stress", *Roanoke Times*, 18 Nov 2007.

[4] EA Schuler & VJ Parenton, "A Recent Epidemic of Hysteria in a Louisiana High School", *Journal of Social Psychology*, 17:221–235, 1943.

[5] JA Knight, TI Friedman & J Sulianti, "Epidemic Hysteria: A Field Study", *American Journal of Public Health*, 55:858–865, 1965.

[6] "Explanation Sought for Teen-Age fainting Spells", *Stevens Point Daily Journal*, Wisconsin, 10 Apr 1976, p11.

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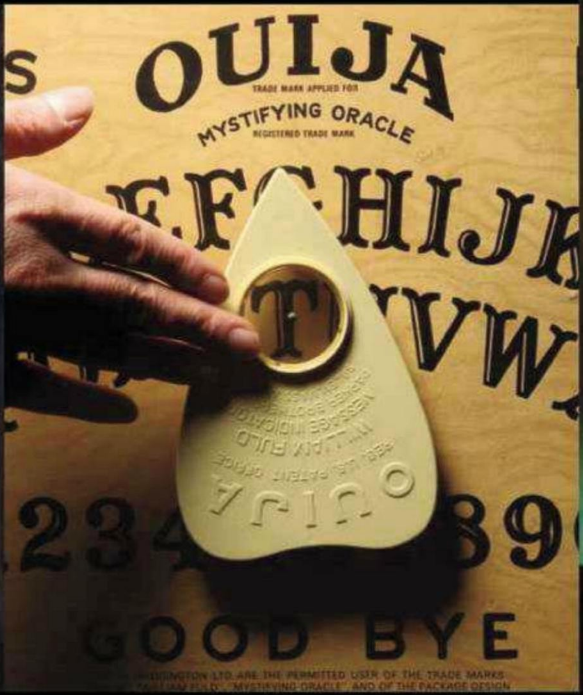
More tales of the unexpected...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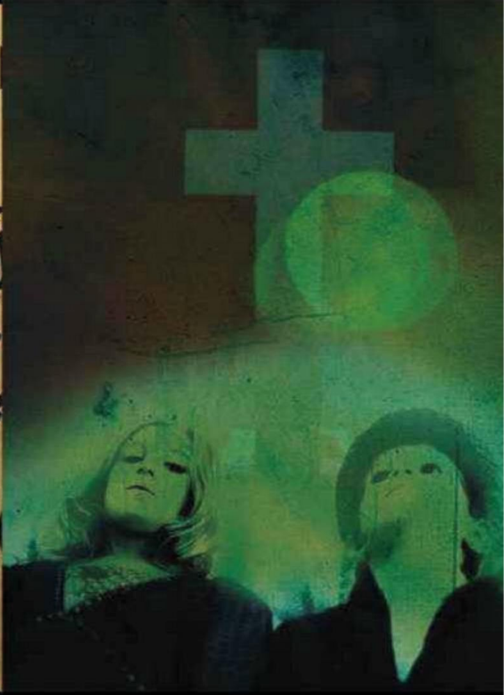
MYSTIFYING ORACLE
GOOD BYE



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of the fog

The ouija session
that summoned a
shadow man

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children who
played patacake

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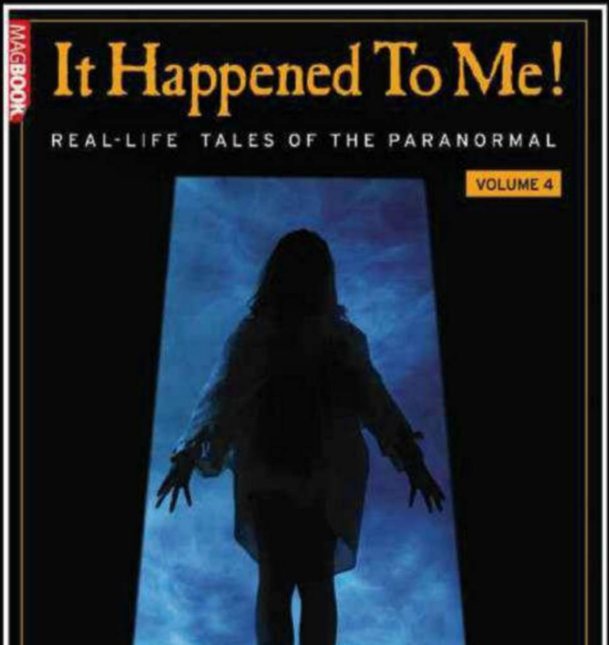
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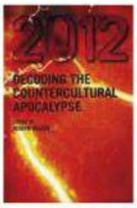
This month's books, films and games

reviews

Skewering doomsday hooey

The 'scholarly' and 'scientific' claims of the amateur doomsday prophesiers are neither, and they can't agree on the nature of the disaster that happens afterwards



2012

Decoding the Countercultural Apocalypse

Ed: Joseph Gelfer

Equinox 2011

Hb, 203pp, illus,refs, notes, ind, £60.00/$99.95, ISBN 9781845536398

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £57.00

This a is collection of 10 longish essays. The contributors are North American or Australian academics apart from John Major Jenkins, who's probably the sanest of 'alternative' interpreters of the infamous 13.0.0.0.0 Maya date.

Not all are experts on the Maya *per se* (one directs a global terrorism research centre), and this makes for several oblique but illuminating approaches, and some fruitful disagreement over matters of detail. A couple – John Hoopes and Joseph Gelfer – contributed heavily condensed versions of their chapters to *FT*'s 2012 Special (**FT285**). Mark Van Stone's erudite but accessible guide to 2012 and Maya culture in general was reviewed in **FT281**.

To get the major whinges out of the way: the index is skimpy, verging on the useless – which is a bit bloody rich given the book's stupefying price. Occasionally, *2012*'s long gestation period (it was first scheduled for 2010 publication) shows; at one point we're told it's "several years" before we'll see the full florescence of the 2012 industry/mythology. A sharper editorial eye or, better, that plus some updating would have been in order, despite the almost unbridgeable void between the concepts 'deadline' and 'academic'.

Otherwise, the book does pretty much everything it says on its tin. It kicks off with a preface by Prof. Michael Coe, whose ambiguous phrasing in *The Maya* in 1966 half-wittingly set the whole 12/12 farrago going. "I was probably out to scare my readers a bit," he admits, and one can imagine the sickly grin. In 1966, he actually (mis)calculated the date of the doom that "would overtake the degenerate peoples of the world" as 24 December 2011 – which, according to then-current conventions, should have been the 21 December 2012 that we all know and love.

Even so, in the 1980 edition, the date mysteriously became 11 January 2013. Eventually, scholars settled on 23 December 2012 as the end of the Maya's fifth Long Count. Coe reckons it's only the coincidence of the northern winter solstice that makes "amateur doomsday prophesiers" stick to 21/12. Which puts the kibosh on so many of their claims to be either scholarly or scientific.

Much of the book nails that kibosh into place. Pete Lentini discusses the 2012 milieu's adoption of stigmatised knowledge – anything the mainstream rejects: the phrase is Charles Barkun's – in promoting its versions of doomsday and, hence, their variety, overlaps and disparities. And he neatly maps the career structure of a typical advocate of stigmatised knowledge. This is rather more interesting than his survey of YouTube videos on 2012, although he does expose some noteworthy madnesses.

Lentini doesn't make the connection, but it's fun to observe that while one set of 2012 apocalyptics is expecting the Yellowstone caldera to blow, another set sees "global elites" preparing to survive the catastrophic arrival of the legendary rogue planet Nibiru (prop. Zechariah Sitchin) by "constructing shelters in Yellowstone National Park and building special boats in anticipation of another great flood". You takes your choice…

> **"'I was probably out to scare my readers a bit,' he admits, and one can imagine the sickly grin"**

Andrea Austin dissects Roland Emmerlich's *2012* to great effect, linking it to mediæval mystery plays, the Noah legend, the apocalyptic movie genre, and (among other things) conspiracy theory, seeing the 2009 film as a compilation of end-time themes, not least is the doomsayers' tacit assumption that there will be survivors – generally subscribers to the particular sayer's particular notion of doom.

These are points on which 2012 sceptics can agree with prophesiers. They would not concur over Kristine Larsen's relentless dismantling of the pseudoscience that purports to underpin the claims of the '2012 community' and the media's dodgy collusion in disseminating it.

On the other hand, it was refreshing to see John Major Jenkins invited into this company – despite the kicking he gets in other chapters. His essential thesis is that, unlike all other calendar makers in history, the Maya calculated their Long Count backwards, from the point (21/12/12) in the future that it would end. Jenkins defends this eccentric take by adducing the solstice, the (non-existent) alignment then between the Sun and the galactic centre, and interpreting an "astronumerological subtext" – unnoticed by professional scholars – that he scries in Mayan inscriptions.

Unlike some others, Jenkins at least doesn't pretend to know what follows 21/12, and doesn't haul in scraps of Hindu, Hopi and Heaven knows who else's culture to prop up his notions.

Such promiscuous cultural plundering is explored in Joseph Gelfer's chapter, which details the inaccuracies visited upon indigenous Antipodeans. What emerges is a re-enchantment of Australia, in particular, as a still-virgin continent that will remain physically and spiritually intact after the Great Change. And here the enlightened of the New Age will gather to establish the New Humanity.

Graham St John analyses another cultural manifestation of the end-time theme – trance music and the psychedelic subculture. This chapter harbours most of the book's comedy, with fungus-inspired gibberish from founding 2012 prophets José Argüelles and Terence McKenna and their acolytes.

Of the latter, Kwali the Red Magnetic Skywalker, who 'upgrades' trance-dance festival-goers to their 'galactic signatures' [*sic*] observes that "people want to know that something funky's

Continued on page 62

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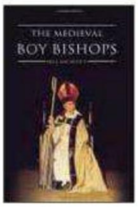
Boys in mitres

The lordlings of misrule deserve a more academic study than this brave attempt



The Medieval Boy Bishops

Neil Mackenzie

Matador 2012
Pb, 174pp, photos, notes, bib, £11.99, ISBN 9781780880082
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £10.79

Boy Bishops were a fascinating phenomenon of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Once a year a boy, usually a cathedral chorister, would be dressed and treated as a bishop for a day, often with other choristers in support, while the real clergy took menial roles.

A new book on them is to be welcomed, but this one disappoints more than it rewards. It's clearly a labour of love – the book's web page says the author has been researching it for 25 years – but it's clumsily constructed and at times awkwardly written.

It begins with an account of the murder of a Boy Bishop in 1367: "the body of a boy floated unnoticed down the River Seine" – but he then tells us that if anyone had noticed the body they would have seen it "dressed in the authentic robes of a bishop". That's bad enough, but as the story continues it becomes clear that after a serious street skirmish between scholars and the local watch, the boy disappeared; however, there's no evidence that he was murdered and thrown in the river.

It's a worrying start – and far too frequently throughout the book Neil Mackenzie makes unsupported assumptions, saying "it is to be surmised that", "in all likelihood", "it can well be imagined", "we can conjecture that" (these all on the same page!) or similar.

The book is written in an old-fashioned voice, with an attitude to history (and to boys) that frequently appears condescending: "It would have been an unwise boy, however, who took too great an advantage of the licence of that day, for there was always the day after when the masters' consciences would be softened and their arms strengthened, ready to deal with the insolent and unruly."

Mackenzie looks into the possible origins of Boy Bishops, then spends about half the book describing their ceremonies, duties and sermons in different cathedrals, often assuming a knowledge of Catholic liturgy and clerical vestments which many readers won't have; he's better at description than at explanation or analysis.

Unfortunately, some of his accounts of the ceremonies and liturgies, in the text and in the appendices, are either not sourced or not dated even to a century, greatly reducing the book's historical usefulness. And he rarely says how old the Boy Bishops are – eight, 12, 15? – a small but important detail.

As with many self-published books, this would have benefited from the attentions of a copy editor, who might have spotted infelicities such as: "The Boy Bishop in modern times, like his medieval counterpart, has been winged across the Atlantic." (The author gives no examples of Boy Bishops in mediæval America…)

The bibliography and notes are useful, but the lack of an index is compounded by the absence of a contents page.

This is a brave attempt, but a comprehensive new study on Boy Bishops is still needed.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
STUDY BY ENTHUSIAST NEEDS MORE SCHOLARLY RIGOUR **6**

Science Ink

Tattoos of the Science Obsessed

Carl Zimmer

Sterling 2011
Hb, 271pp, illus, $24.95/£16.99, ISBN 9781402783609
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29

science
Ink

This is about something close to my heart; in fact, about three inches to the left: a tattoo of cosmic ray traces from a cloud chamber on my shoulder.

Carl Zimmer, a well known US science journalist, wondered online whether any scientists had tattoos relating to their research. Pictures of all sorts of amazing tattoos and the stories behind them started to appear in his in-box. There are a lot of tattoo fiends in science and they are imaginative about their ink.

Zimmer started a blog (http://bit.ly/BY0L) and when interest grew, produced this marvellous book. What could have easily been a cash-in job is a beautiful artifact, with cover cut-outs, a proper spine and high-quality colour illustrations on good paper.

It is more than just coffee table tattoo porn, though. As well as excellent photos of the tattoos, you get explanations of why they were done and the science they express, all beautifully written. There is a startling array of ingenious tats from across the spectrum of the sciences, from stark black mathematical symbols and equations to the glorious pastel kaleidoscope of a geological section running across one woman's back. There are scientific axioms in delicate, swirling calligraphy; giant microscopes amid a lurid swirl of microorganisms, fossils, DNA spirals; and even a few other people with cosmic rays. Ira Klotsko has the solar system on his stomach, Michael Leasman the Milky Way on his right foot, others have molecules – benzene, caffeine, Phenobarbital, LSD.

The stories, too, reveal many reasons for having tattoos. Mine was done in front of a science of body modification event audience. Hannah Rosa got a narrow bordered bee hawk moth as part of the Extinked project which tattooed endangered species on volunteers; hers is one of the most beautiful. Others people's tattoos reflect research interests or obsessions, but most touching is the tale of Abigail Garcia's entropy tattoo. Months after posting it to Zimmer's blog, she died in a road accident: her mother now has the same tattoo to remember her by.

This array of flamboyant ink gives the lie to the image of scientists as nerdy with no artistic sense. From a serendipitous start has emerged a kind, wise and inspirational book. I'm planning at least two more science tattoos and a fortean one…

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict
INSPIRATIONAL AND VERY HANDSOME GUIDE TO GEEK TATS **9**

The Amesbury Archer and the Boscombe Bowmen

Bell Beaker Burials at Boscombe Down, Amesbury, Wiltshire

AP Fitzpatrick

Wessex Archæological Reports 2011
Hb, 240pp, £30.00, ISBN 9781874350545
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £30.00

Shortly before 2,500 BC, at the close of the Late Neolithic period, a new race came into Britain. The mysterious Beaker People originated from Iberia; named after their distinctive style of pottery, they probably travelled up from the Rhineland, passing through the Netherlands before reaching Britain. Bringing metalworking and other skills, the invaders may have been welcomed and respected by the Britons, and for just a few centuries they managed to retain their own cultural identity and customs. Beautifully illustrated and highly readable, this account examines in great detail a unique group of Beaker burials found during the building of a housing estate not far from Stonehenge. The grave of the Amesbury Archer is probably the most richly furnished example found in Europe: now identified as a high-status metal-worker, he may have been among the very first Beaker People to arrive. Oxygen isotope analysis suggests that he spent part of his childhood in the Alps; other individuals of the Boscombe group also originated from continental Europe and were widely travelled. The burials have attracted a good deal of attention (hence their media-friendly names) but reporting has previously been rather sketchy. This book, although primarily a grown-up 'monograph' for archæologists, is an excellent and enjoyable read for anyone wishing to know the full story.

Steve Marshall

Fortean Times Verdict
GREAT IF YOU'RE CURIOUS ABOUT THE MYSTERIOUS BEAKER PEOPLE **9**

Galileo

Selected Writings

Trans: William R Shea and Mark Davie

Oxford University Press 2012
Pb, 480pp, illus, notes, ind, £10.99, ISBN 9780199583690
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.89

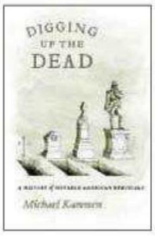
Galileo was the first person to make systematic observations of the night sky through a telescope, and his discoveries convinced him that Copernicus was right: the Earth revolves around the Sun, not the other way around. This famously got him in trouble with the Church, but it's clear from this selection of writings that Galileo had no quarrels with the Bible – he even quoted scripture on occasion to support the Sun-centred view. His real opponents were the Aristotelian philosophers of his day, and it's against them that his carefully laid-out arguments and cutting sarcasm are aimed. Anyone who is fascinated by the conflict of ideas and world-views will find something of interest in this book, although it can be tough going. Many of the points Galileo takes pages to explain are considered self-evident today, while the views he refutes are long forgotten. But some of his observations are as valid as when he wrote them 400 years ago: "I have noticed [..] that the less someone knows and understands about some intellectual matter, the more determined they are to hold forth about it…"

Andrew May

Fortean Times Verdict
IT'S OLD NEWS NOW, BUT HISTORICALLY FASCINATING **8**

Deceased but moving

A study of disinterment and reburial from the Confederacy to the arrival of DNA is a bit light on bizarreness and shocks



Digging up the Dead

A History of Notable American Reburials

Michael Kammen

University of Chicago Press 2010
Hb, 272pp, illus, $25.00/£16.50, ISBN 9780226423296
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.85

I had never read a book entirely about exhumations, so I wasn't sure what to expect. *Digging up the Dead* begins with the disinterment of American President of the Confederacy Jefferson Davis from New Orleans and the reburial of his remains in Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond. I had been to his grave in Virginia, but had never seen the reproduced photograph of his original 1889 burial procession. So far, so good. Though the subtitle declares that the book is about notable American reburials, Kammen strays beyond the mere comparison of "famous examples in Eastern and Western Europe." A little further on, he discusses the strange history of the skull of French philosopher René Descartes, which I had also seen on a trip to Paris. Soon I was checking off the places I had visited, including Oak Hill Cemetery in Washington, DC (which once held the remains of Willie Lincoln), and Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield, Illinois (which has boasted the tomb of the president and his son since 1874). So it was a comfortable read, but then came the insights.

Exhumation and relocation have little to do with religious values and more to do with pride of ownership, as illustrated by the struggle between Philadelphia and Baltimore over the body of Edgar Allan Poe and the fight between Missouri and Kentucky for the remains of frontiersman Daniel Boone. Cities and states benefit from deceased notables; the cemetery becomes a draw for those who want to visit the grave and those who want to be laid to rest near it.

Such celebrity 'replantings' (my word, not the author's) may be prompted by a change in the dead person's reputation, a realisation that the existing gravesite is neglected, or a desire by the family to have a member reburied more appropriately. President Ulysses S Grant, for instance, was reinterred in a suitable tomb in New York City 12 years after his death. Kammen calls reburial a "resurrection of reputation", which may extend to historical revisionism.

I glossed over the discussion of exhumation as a political tool (Mussolini in Italy and Stalin in Russia, but also the controversies in the United States over removing and retaining Union and Confederate Civil War dead). And I skimmed the examples of the politically sensitive reburials of Native Americans (Chief Sitting Bull) and African Americans.

What I was after was the author's promise in the preface of "the bizarre and the shocking." This came – to a degree – in the form of one story in particular. American architect Frank Lloyd Wright's remains were secretly exhumed from a family cemetery in Wisconsin, cremated and transferred to Arizona, an act which provoked widespread disbelief and anger. In the midst of the public outcry, a *New York Times* editorialist equated it to uprooting President Thomas Jefferson from his homestead of Monticello and reburying him in showy Beverly Hills. At the same time, Wright's daughter observed, "He may be laughing for all we know, because his spirit is much bigger than his bones."

Digging up the Dead, as it turns out, is more about spirit than bones. The word "mouldering" does come up in the text, but there is not as much gore as I expected. Perhaps because it happened overseas, Kammen makes only the briefest mention of French revolutionary Georges Danton digging up his wife for a last embrace, so I had to turn to the Web for details. The exhumation of Jesse James for DNA testing is touched on, but I wondered why there weren't more examples of this technology being put to the test on the American dead.

There is a chapter on religious figures disinterred by devotion, but no specifics about incorruptible bodies signifying sainthood. And vicarious visits to sites like the writer-laden Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Massachusetts, were rather uneventful. More weighty than meaty, if you know what I mean. But the scholarship is solid and the book is indexed, footnoted, and illustrated.

Christine Quigley

Fortean Times Verdict
MORE MOVING STIFFS THAN DAWN OF THE DEAD... **8**

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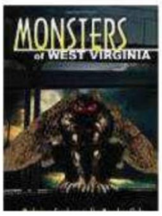
Looking for screamers

Things with wings, spectral mutts, phantasmal felids and the woolly Sheepsquatch make the Mountain State a bit unsettling



Monsters of West Virginia

Mysterious Creatures in the Mountain State

Rosemary Ellen Guiley

Stackpole Books 2012
Pb, 136pp, $12.95/£10.99, ISBN 9780811710282
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £10.99

Stackpole continues its state-by-state survey of American 'monsters' with a visit to West Virginia penned by fortean author Rosemary Guiley, who has published 50-odd books since 1983, most dealing with paranormal phenomena. There's no doubt she knows the territory. She also knows the Mountain State and lectures each year at September's Mothman Festival in Point Pleasant.

Her latest work begins with an introductory survey of West Virginia weirdness, and a warning that may unsettle would-be cryptozoologists of the 'flesh and blood' school, who are convinced that most cryptid sightings can be explained with reference to species either deemed extinct or presently unrecognised by science.

Guiley follows John Alva Keel in suggesting that cryptids intrude on our reality from parallel dimensions. Mountains, mine shafts and rivers, she says, enhance the possibility of drop-ins. And where better to find them than in West Virginia?

Guiley's opus is divided into 12 topical chapters. The first relates encounters with the Grafton Monster, a large white 'something' that roamed around Taylor County in 1964, scaring locals and dodging more intrepid monster hunters.

Chapters two and three review uncanny things with wings. Giant birds and creatures resembling prehistoric pterosaurs lead the way, followed by a full chapter devoted to Mothman.

Most *FT* readers will be familiar with this man-bird of ill omen, but some may be surprised to read of sightings logged around disaster scenes since 1967 – reaching on, in fact, to 11 September 2001, when a similar creature allegedly went for a spin around the soon-to-be-demolished Twin Towers.

Chapter four vaults back in time to cover the famous Flatwoods Monster case of 1952, often presented in UFO literature as an extraterrestrial sighting. Guiley updates the hoary tale with theories propounded by paranormal researcher Frank Feschino Jr, who published his findings of the supposed Flatwoods cover-up in 2004 (with a revised and corrected 60th-anniversary edition planned for 2012).

Chapter five embarks on the trail of West Virginia's Bigfoot, locally known as the Yayo or Yahoo. Guiley presents a fair sampling of sightings logged since 1960, while stopping short of the 80 cases listed by the Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization.

Chapter six lets the dogs out with descriptions of mystery canids that don't fit the model of man's best friend. Casting back to 1577 for some of its earliest cases, this section includes spectral hounds, werewolves, a predator dubbed the Blue Devil, a 'wolf-bear' noted for its luminous red eyes, and a canine 'incubus' said to prey on humans as they sleep.

Mystery felids get their turn in Chapter seven, with specimens including misplaced lions and black panthers, a winged cat from Pinesville, and a 'wampus cat' that seems more phantasmal than feline.

Curiously missing – possibly for lack of space, or being ranked as too mundane – are the numerous reports of West Virginia cougars logged since the last "official" specimen was killed, around 1880.

Chapter eight returns to a theme of 'white things' that terrorise Mountain State residents. Reported in various forms – from an albino lion to an "impossibly large dog", shaggy creatures that levitate and a woolly monstrosity dubbed Sheepsquatch – white monsters afflict the former Jim Crow state that sent Ku Klux Klan recruiter Robert Byrd to the US Senate in 1959 with an ironic case of leukophobia.

Chapter nine devotes its brief three pages to the Snallygaster, a "famous flying reptile" initially reported in 1909, hunted sporadically through the 1940s, and finally ridiculed out of existence in 1982, when state legislators declared it an endangered species.

Chapter 10 departs from cryptozoology entirely, with a rundown on banshees, 'night goers' and another spectral dog (white, naturally) that serve as omens of impending death.

Chapter 11 rebounds with a mixed bag of entities, including a couple of 'screamers', a still-unidentified blob, a pair of manta rays seen winging over West Virginia in 2004 and some aquatic cryptids that quite sensibly confine themselves to rivers.

Chapter 12 closes the show with a survey of the state's 'haunted hollers', rural sites where anything can happen – and frequently does.

Monsters of West Virginia has no current competition in print, and fans of forteana may find it a useful addition to their libraries at its relatively modest price.

Michael Newton

Fortean Times Verdict

ESSENTIAL FOR SNALLYGASTER AND SHEEPSQUATCH INFO 9

Continued from page 59

coming". Indeed. Hippies are alive and well, even if the originals had better music.

Missing from this chapter, as from most others, is the taking of a step or two back and a duck and dive under the superficial aspects of the spectacle under discussion. St John takes fellow-contributor Robert Sitler to task for dismissing the 2012 phenomenon as "meaningless" because "its power as a self-validating set of ideas establishes a reality of its own among believers who have no interest in examining the authenticity of those beliefs." One could say as much of Buddhists, UFO buffs, proponents of anthropogenetic global warming, gun-control freaks, and the entire elfin safety brigade, of course.

St John rightly observes that Sitler misses "the critical nuances of an ethos and technology for redressing existential, ecological and humanitarian crises", but he does so in his very last paragraph and doesn't develop the point beyond noting that psytrance allows its activists to seek "radical transformations of consciousness within the province of a 'progressive millenarianism'".

But that's kind of obvious: St John addresses neither what those transformations of consciousness might imply (or bring in train if widely adopted), nor why a particular cross-section of society has chosen this route to transcendence – some would call it mere obliteration – or some species of millennium.

Other contributors remark (sometimes patronisingly) on the self-serving nature of 2012 proponents, but don't scrutinise their ideas' appeal to the '2012 community' in any depth. There's no discussion of the rôle of violence in New Age prophecies of humanity's transition to a 'higher level of consciousness'. There's a chapter – a deeper decoding – missing from this book. But what is here is all worth reading. Buy or borrow before the Great Day dawns.

Peter Brookesmith

Fortean Times Verdict

NECESSARY – IF COSTLY – ANALYSIS OF NEW AGE DRIVEL 9

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

JFK & UFO: MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL CONSPIRACY AND COVER-UP FROM MAURY ISLAND TO DALLAS

Kenn Thomas

Feral House (feralhouse.com) 2011
Pb, pp271, £12.99
ISBN 9781936239061

Kenn Thomas is the USA's pre-eminent historian of that shadowy world of 'military-industrial' conspiracy described by Gary Lesley as "the complex, phantom machinations of the human hierarchy". In this intense book, Thomas brings together different strands of research and suspicion – from the assassination of Kennedy to the earliest high-profile UFO incidents: Kenneth Arnold's famous sighting and the mysterious 1947 shower of toxic junk at Maury Island which killed a dog and burned a boy's arm. What links these two cauldrons of conspiracy theories is one man – Fred Lee Crisman – who was present at both scenes and who was somehow associated with the mysterious 'tramps' on the Grassy Knoll in Dallas, in 1968. This is also the story behind what Oliver Stone tried to depict in his 1992 movie *JFK*. Thomas's attention to detail is impressive, leaving a disturbing feeling of sinister doings in high places.

NATURFENOMEN

Clas Svahn

Bokforlaget Semic (semic.se) 2011
Hb, pp128, notes, illus, Kr139
ISBN 9789155257415

There haven't been too many memorable books on the extreme, yet natural, wonders of our dynamic planet since the likes of Frank Lane's *The Elements Rage* (1945). This is an odd omission, since so many of the phenomena involved are anomalous and of great interest to forteans. Now the veteran Swedish ufologist Clas Svahn has produced a book for us to drool over, with amazing illustrations (most in full colour) on extreme manifestations of geology, hydrology, meteorology and celestial optics. It includes giant spikes, stacks, revolving discs and spiky flowers of ice; lights and mirages on the ocean; unusual rainbows, solar halos, odd clouds, fortean falls, auroras and solar phenomena. The text is in Swedish but the profuse pictures speak for themselves.

THE SHADOWS LIFTED FROM DEATH

Augustus Henry Burbidge

Roundtable Publishing (roundtablepublishing-uk.com) 2011
Pb, pp248, £8.99
ISBN 9780956449344

There was once a fashion for books like this, that purport to be the narrative of "an unknown entity" as it travels through death, wandering in the world beyond and meeting all sorts of 'advanced' beings who deliver dry philosophical lectures on morality, eschatology, and life on the higher planes of spiritual existence.
It was a format used freely by earnest 'survival' teachings, fake autobiographies and mediocre novels. This book harks back to that time. It is told through 'automatic writing' received by the British spiritualist medium Augustus Burbidge who, himself, died in 1969; the manuscript was found by the executors of Burbidge's estate long after his death. The narrator is confused at first but soon adapts to his "unexpected" environment. Apparently, it is pretty much like this world. There is no corroboration; you just have to take the author's word for it.

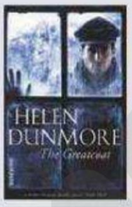
REAL ALIENS, SPACE BEINGS AND CREATURES FROM OTHER WORLDS

Brad Steiger & Sherry Hansen Steiger

Visible Ink Press (visibleinkpress.com) 2011
Pb, pp370, index, bib, illus, £16.99
ISBN 9781578593330

There can be few veteran writers on contemporary lore and mythology more knowledgeable than American Brad Steiger, who has been active since the mid-1960s. Wiki credits him with writing over 170 books and 2,000-plus syndicated columns. His wife Sherry is nearly as prolific, with more than 40 books to her name. His early books on forteana and ufology were inspiring to budding forteans in the 1970s. This book is a vast, encyclopædic sprawl of 24 major topics to do with aliens and 'entities' and UFOs, conspiracies and abductions, New Age philosophies and strange cults, divided into hundreds of small, headed articles. While some of the content will be familiar to 'old hands', much of it will be new to today's audience (this reviewer, for example, had not known of the Vrilerinnen, a group of five "beautiful young women psychics" who, in 1921, began channelling Aryan aliens from the Aldebaran star system, and who are rumoured to have later gone by submarine to a secret Antarctic base or to live on another planet). There is additional content by 10 of the author's artist and writer friends, but just who did what is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, this is a fascinating compilation by the Steigers at their best, as they review their personal opinions of and interactions with witnesses, claimants and informants, believers and sceptics, during those five decades.

FORTEAN FICTION



The Greatcoat

Helen Dunmore

Hammer Books, 2012
Hb, pp196, £9.99
ISBN 9780099564939

In the post-war Britain of 1952, newlywed Isabel Carey arrives in a small Yorkshire town with husband Philip, a doctor. Memories of war still echo from the abandoned Lancashire bomber airfield and barracks nearby. Isabel's initial fears are concerned with the privations of post-war rationing and her worry that her husband is gradually turning into a clone of the elderly Dr Ingoldby. But mostly she is concerned with the prying eyes of her surly landlady, whose incessant pacing in the room above soon frays Isabel's nerves. Isabel's search for extra bedding one night uncovers an old Air Force greatcoat at the back of a cupboard, its warmth salving the loneliness brought on by her husband's frequent duty calls as much as it keeps out the cold. It's then that Isabel begins to receive spooky visitations, and the line between reality and the ghostly begins to blur.

The Greatcoat bears all the hallmarks of Orange Prize Winner Helen Dunmore's limpid prose style. Not all ghost stories need to be outright scary; they can be unsettling, or memorably atmospheric, as long as – crucially – they create an air of the credible amid the incredible. This is the main achievement of *The Greatcoat*. Isabel's torment, caught between hallucination and very real possession, is well rendered, but it certainly isn't scary. However, neither is it one-dimensional, as so much genre fiction can be. Dunmore layers her work, and *The Greatcoat* can be read on one level as an erotically-charged metaphor for a frustrated young woman's longing to emancipate herself from the home-making strictures of a post-war Britain demanding a population and cake-baking boost. If you fancy a romantic ghost story in which consummation is sought in the supernatural, you won't be disappointed.
Nick Čirkovič

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS AND GAMES TO:
THE EDITOR, **FORTEAN TIMES**, DENNIS CONSUMER DIVISION,
30 CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON W1T 4JD, UK.

The Cabin in the Woods

Dir Drew Goddard, US 2012
On UK release from 13 April

The avowed intention of the Joss Whedon produced and co-written *The Cabin in the Woods* is to thwart the expectations of the audience with a series of handbrake turns in the plot, upending the genre staples and clichés. At first, we seem to be watching the set-up for a reality TV snuff movie (I'm giving nothing away by revealing this, as the film does exactly that in the opening credits), but as things unfold, the stakes are much higher.

A group of five college kids – the athletic blond and her beefcake boyfriend, the more sensitive girl and boy (also sporty, but wearing glasses) and the joker in the pack (geeky pot-smoking Marty, played by Fran Kranz) – go away to a secluded forest cabin, as you do. A weekend of booze and bonking lies ahead and that's when the funfair fear ride really begins for us, and our fatal five.

Following the trajectory of its own desire to upend genre staples, the film falters at times in terms of plot momentum, and actually falls back on hoary old tropes far more often than it wants to admit. What it does manage to thwart is the bathos of a massive injection of CGI, which has destroyed the build-up of expectations in many a horror film. When all hell breaks loose, the orgy of blood-letting is superbly well done. The characters are genuinely endearing or noble, getting away from the usual irksome college kid arseholes you can't wait to see get topped, and the ensemble cast has you rooting for them all the way. The inclusion of an iconic horror figure of the heroic kind as a villain is a nice touch, too.

Concept-wise, *Cabin* is comic book fan-boy stuff, but as a film it has a machine heart. While it nods to the likes of *Evil Dead* with its milieu and ground-level tracking shots of something-wicked-coming-this-way through the forest, there is no truly memorable, preposterous eye-ball-swallowing moment. Nor does it resonate like a truly great horror film – the subliminal flashes of a dead mother in a crowded street you simply can't exorcise amid all those pea-soup pyrotechnics. It simply doesn't bore deep enough into one's consciousness or possess enough sheer, visceral nastiness to sear into your retinas either.

Director Drew (*Cloverfield*) Goddard's film excels as the hair-raising, 15 Cert teenage joyride it is, and is indeed great fun while it lasts. But it is no more a game-changer (as one reviewer described it) for the horror film genre than an iPad 3 is for computing.

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict
FUN AND GAMES FRIDAY NIGHT FRIGHT FEST FROM WHEDON 7

Silent House

Dir Chris Kentis and Laura Lau, US/France 2011
On UK release from 4 May

Oh, the trials and tribulations faced by pretty young women in unfeasibly skimpy tops, all in the name of horror. This example of the genre, *Silent House*, is directed by the two behind 2003's shark-infested *Open Water* and is a remake of the 2010 Uruguayan Cannes Film Festival favourite *La Casa Muda*, directed by Gustavo Hernández.

The story centres on Sarah, played by Elizabeth Olsen, who is trapped in her family's lakeside holiday home, alone and without electricity, after a mysterious incident has put first her father and then her uncle out of the picture. Puzzling polaroid pictures and a locked petty cash tin add to the suspense.

There are certainly plenty of horror clichés, not least the pretty young woman in peril, as well as a closed shower curtain, a large hammer being knocked threateningly through a wall and a bath filled with blood, amongst others. However, there is a lot to commend in this film, particularly Elizabeth Olsen's performance. The camera focuses directly on her, often on her face, through long takes for most of the film and this capable young actress does a great job of looking and acting scared out of her wits. Her character is strong and resourceful and, thankfully, there is not too much screaming.

The Uruguayan original was supposedly filmed in one four-day take: the remake should make a great game for film nerds to spot the joins, as there don't seem to be a great number of cuts throughout this version either. The technical difficulties thrown up by the long takes are justified by the way in which they render the terror felt by Sarah in this enclosed space more 'real' and intimate. The lighting in the mainly candle and portable lantern-lit interior is effective, and the detailed use of sound – banging doors, a battery-powered light and the whirr of a polaroid camera – is fantastic. On the minus side, the characters of the father and uncle aren't very well drawn and the father's performance in particular is a little wooden. The ending is unfortunately a silly, mad Shyamalan-esque denouément that detracts from the good things that have preceded it.

Although I wouldn't recommend this film for those with 'shaky cam' syndrome (I mention this as my husband is one), it's a very watchable horror film and, if the number of jumps and nervous giggles I witnessed at the screening are anything to go by, it is certainly worth seeing.

Julie McNamee

Fortean Times Verdict
MOSTLY EFFECTIVE, IF HARDLY GROUND-BREAKING, HORROR 6

Teen Wolf

Dir Rod Daniel, US 1985
20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, £9.99

Hot on the heels of his *Back to the Future* success, Michael J Fox starred in this successful teen comedy which spawned a sequel, a cartoon series and now a brand new MTV series. It's a not-so-subtle take on puberty, where high-school kid Fox discovers his body is changing in unexpected ways. Only he's getting hairier than most – because he's a werewolf. But rather than being seen as a monster or a freak, his lycanthropy makes him the most popular kid in school. He's more attractive to women, he's better at basketball and, best of all in terms of popularity, he can get served at the local off licence with a flash of his red eyes!

When it was first released in 1985, critics complained about the film's lack of substance. Watching it again now, I see what they mean. Fox starts as a nerd, changes into a wolf for a while, then turns back again, happy with his non-wolf self. That's about it. It could have been an interesting take on teenage angst and popularity, or even just an all-out goofball comedy. But it ends up being neither, and is just simplistic. The poignant moments are few and far between, and the meaty comedy moments sparse. For those who watched it as teenagers, though, the film remains a cult favourite. It's certainly a fun window onto mid-1980s fashions and styles. Fox is his usual likeable self, and his best scene is his frantic slipping across a wet school corridor. It's lightweight stuff, but for some people that will be part of the charm. By comparison, the new MTV series is taking the franchise into darker, more serious territory (but then 'going darker' is the predictable MO of most remakes and reboots these days). As it stands, the original *Teen Wolf* is a harmless, sometimes fun, but ultimately forgettable comedy.

Released on Blu-Ray, the image and sound are reasonably better than DVD but there are no real revelations in the transfer – apart from one. The much-discussed moment in the final shot where a background extra is supposed to flash his penis for the camera is nothing of the sort. It's a woman; and she forgot to zip up her fly. It made me laugh out loud though.

Rev. Peter Laws

Fortean Times Verdict

BACK TO THE 80s FOR TOOTHLESS WEREWOLF ROMP **5**

The Devils

Dir Ken Russell, UK 1971

BFI, £19.99

The events that took place in Loudon, France, in 1634 – in which an Ursuline convent was beset by a wave of demonic possessions and Father Urbain Grandier was accused of sorcery and burnt at the stake – have entered the annals of 'mass hysteria' and inspired a number of creative responses, chiefly Aldous Huxley's 1952 book, which in turn provided the impetus for a 1960 play by John Whiting, a 1969 opera by Krzysztof Penderecki and, most notoriously, Ken Russell's 1971 film starring Oliver Reed as Grandier and Vanessa Redgrave as Sister Jeanne, mother superior of the convent at Loudun.

The notoriety was, of course, down to the film's commitment to showing, rather than describing, the extreme behaviours on show at Loudun. This was a challenge which the flamboyant Russell was determined to rise to: plague-wracked bodies, naked, writhing nuns, torture, masturbation and enthusiastically administered enemas were grist to his fevered visual imagination, positively guaranteeing a collision course with the critical establishment and the censors of the BBFC.

As a result, *The Devils* was butchered before it reached cinema screens, shorn of whole sequences – most famously the extended 'Rape of Christ' passage, in which hysterical, sex-crazed sisters have their way with a life-size statue of Jesus while a masturbating priest looks on. The good news is that these sequences – previously missing, believed lost – turned up a few years ago, in time for Ken Russell to oversee a new 'director's cut' of the film, screened in 2004. The bad news is that Warner Bros continue to sit on the resoration, offering little hope of a DVD release.

So, what we have in this excellent, extra-laden two-disc BFI release is the original X-Certificate UK theatrical version, an improvement on the old videos based on the shorter US cut. Even in this form, it remains Russell's masterpiece: outrageous, shocking, funny, serious and camp by turns, it's a visual triumph and a vindication of its director's eccentric, scattershot vision. Derek Jarman's sets look as arresting now as they did back in 1971, while Peter Maxwell Davies's keening, visceral score gives Penderecki a run for his money. Vanessa Redgrave's repressed, hunchbacked mother superior is good, but Oliver Reed's Grandier has real gravitas, and the camera loves him.

Derek, Ollie and now poor old Ken… all gone. It's hard, watching *The Devils*, not to feel that a whole era of maverick British cinema is now well and truly over.

David Sutton

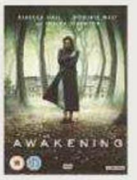
Fortean Times Verdict

PIETY, POLITICS AND NAKED NUNS IN RUSSELL'S CLASSIC **8**

SHORTS

THE AWAKENING

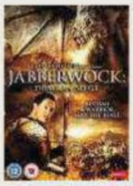
(Studio Canal, £13.99/£9.99)



It's 1921, and in a Britain still reeling from the Great War, séances and spiritualism meet the emotional needs of a nation coming to terms with its losses. It's a time for ghosts, as the film has it, but petticoated skepchick and author Florence Cathcart (Rebecca Hall) is determined to exorcise her own dead lover by debunking such supernatural shenanigans – until she responds to teacher Robert Mallory's (Dominic West) request for help and finds herself investigating a death and a haunting at a lonely country boarding school. As is ever the way with determined sceptics, Florence finds her initial certainties crumbling in the face of disturbing supernatural events and a palpable air of emotional desolation that threatens to engulf even her. This period ghost story (co-written by director Nick Murphy and Steve Volk of *Ghostwatch* fame) is a laudable attempt at a thoughtful, grown-up horror story. Handsomely mounted, well-acted and atmospherically shot, *The Awakening* can't help but invoke *The Turn of the Screw*, while never quite attaining that tale's capacity for ambiguous chills. **DS 7/10**

JABBERWOCK: DRAGON SIEGE

(Chelsea Films, £12.99)



Knowing it's a SyFy Channel production should be enough: Low, low production values and some beefcake from 'cult' shows that were prematurely killed-off. In this case it's Tahmoh Penikett (Ballard from the short-lived and underrated *Dollhouse*), getting to fight the Jabberwock. The time period is indistinct: people talk of the Romans as ancient history and look a bit like Celts, but sort of mediaeval at the same time. And they recite Carroll's 'Jabberwocky' as myth and scripture. When and where the hell is this film set? The performances are wooden, with dialects and accents seemingly given free rein. It's as though John Wayne's Centurion is venerated as the personification of method acting in some bonkers parallel universe. Special effects run to lots of slashing and thrusting at a creature that quite simply isn't there, while the Jabberwock seems to favour thrusting bits of old liver in his victims' pockets and poking through their shirts as proof of his murderous nature. Adequate fodder for *Merlin* and *Primeval* fans, perhaps; but, like other SyFy productions, it's not quite bad enough to be truly great.

Tim Weinberg 4/10

THE RETURN OF THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.

(Fremantle Media, £15.99)

This return is actually from 1983 and finds our heroes 15 years on from their time at U.N.C.L.E. Napoleon's a (rather poor) professional gambler, while Ilya is now a highly-strung dress-maker (!)

Camper, if that's possible, than the 1960s series, there are also rather bizarre and somewhat superfluous appearances from George Lazenby as JB and Patrick Macnee as Sir John as knock-off versions of Bond and Steed. David McCullum seems embarrassed by the whole venture, barely containing his contempt for the dialogue, so, unsurprisingly, Robert Vaughan is the best thing here. Nearly 30 years on, he's still peddling his mannered wares on *Hustle* and even Corrie. More power to him. **TW 4/10**

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Syndicate

PC £34.99, PS3, XBox £49.99, EA/Starbreeze Studios

Syndicate 2012 stems from Bullfrog Productions's 1993 isometric tactical shooter original. This SF first person shooter reboot has some impressive contributors: award-winning SF and fantasy writer Richard Morgan (*Altered Carbon*) wrote the storyline, while actor Brian Cox provides one of the voiceovers. As SF, the game covers comparable cyberpunk bio-enhancement territory to Morgan's Takashi Kovacs novels. Game-wise, it means that the Dart bio-chip implant you possess as Miles Kilo enables you to create a blanket digital scan of your environment. It also provides you with hacking potential of a truly lethal kind, enabling you to hijack enemies' chips and take them out by using Suicide, Backfire and Persuade abilities.

At first, you feel as though you're looking through the eyes of the Terminator, with a digital sensory overload of white line-indicated malleable objects within your field of view and a world awash with eye-dazzling glass and neon bling. But once the fighting begins, you focus on simply trying to stay alive in a world ruled by mega-corporations (like your own Eurocorp). With only part of the population embracing the chip implant, the rest of the world have become second class citizens, to say the least, worse off than surfing on dial-up. Agent Kilo's business is corporate espionage ('Business is war'), which involves hacking into facilities and fighting off security AI and tactical forces with a variety of gunmetal and digital chip weaponry. An RPG element allows enhancements of skill sets, while a four-player online co-op mode updates the original *Syndicate* shooter experience.

As an FPS, while no stand-out classic, *Syndicate* has its fair share of adrenalin rush firefights and gruesome enemy demises to dish out. Playing it on PC, while the world is bleached by lighting to a predominantly blue hue, I suffered no buggy nonsense, and the frosty heart of a world where human emotion has been replaced by computer chips is atmospherically rendered. Story-wise, Kilo's backstory and the ongoing cross and double-cross intertwine effectively in between all the blasting. The single player is no vast, sprawling masterpiece, but it does throw in enough variety as it progresses to make you want to keep moving forward in what is more a rampage through corporate glass mountains than *Mass Effect 3* galaxy-zapping.

And you get a minigun, for goodness sake.

Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict

NOT OUT OF THIS WORLD, BUT WORTHY OF GLOBAL SYNDICATION **7**

INTERVIEW

MARK YON talks to RICHARD MORGAN

Richard Morgan is the multi-award winning writer of seven novels to date. His first book, *Altered Carbon*, was published in 2002 and won the Philip K Dick Award in 2003. His third novel, *Market Forces*, was an Arthur C Clarke Award nominee and a John W Campbell Memorial Award winner in 2005. He won the Arthur C Clarke Award for *Black Man* in 2008. Apart from novels, he has written two mini-series for Marvel Comics. An avid gamer, he was the lead writer for *Crysis 2* (2011) and now, *Syndicate* (2012). His latest fiction, the *Land Fit for Heroes* series, is a fantasy-based trilogy; the second and most recent of which is *The Cold Commands*.

FT: Future corporations, business agents/assassins and a definite *Altered Carbon/ Market Forces* vibe: I think I can see why *Syndicate* might have appealed to you...

RM: Well, as you say, it seemed like a natural match – this is ground I know well from my own work; but beyond that there's the fact that I've been an avid gamer since 2002, so when a major games company showed up asking me if I'd like to work on a title in my area of practice, it took about 10 seconds to work out the answer!

I was called in initially to create an overarching narrative, which was more or less like writing a long short story set in the game world. Then there was a lot of tweaking back and forth at Starbreeze as we worked to align the detail of the narrative with the gameplay dynamics. And finally I collaborated with Starbreeze's writers to create the actual moment-by-moment scripting. It was pretty much a perfect introduction to the practice of game writing.

FT: What can you tell us about Miles Kilo? Is he similar to Carl Marsalis, from your novel *Black Man*?

RM: Not really, no. The original *Syndicate* is a far more brutalist vision of the future than the one I had in *Black Man*. Marsalis, for all the genome tweaking and training, is still fundamentally a functional human being, with all that implies. He has personal agendas, a sense of self, a life. The agents in *Syndicate* are something far bleaker than that. They're essentially plug-and-play tools for the corporations who create them – robots made from human flesh. And that was part of the challenge, really. We wanted to stay true to the vision of the original, and that meant a truly dehumanised protagonist. When you first step into Miles Kilo's shoes, you really are a cold-blooded monster. Now, in the course of the game narrative, some of that starts to change, of course, but not as much as you might think – the shift is quite subtle, and it's left open to some serious moral questions. And at the end of the game, you're left facing those same questions: to what extent are you still simply a plug-in, psychopathic, blunt instrument? To what extent have you really changed?

FT: How different is it writing for a visual medium?

RM: It's not in itself something new for me. I've done both comic-book work and screenwriting at one time or another, and game scripting is a close enough relative to those that it wasn't wholly unfamiliar territory. But you have to re-jig when you cross over from novel writing, sure. It's a whole different set of assumptions, and those come with both pros and cons. And then, within that shift, there's the fact that writing for a game is in some ways very different from other visual media as well. So it's a pretty steep learning curve all round. Which is a blessing for a writer – it keeps you sharp.

FT: Where do your ideas stem from? Do you read widely on current speculations in science as a matter of course? Or gather together your ideas from more esoteric sources?

RM: It's a bit of everything, I suppose. I'm a big fan of popular science literature. I consume a lot of it as a matter of course in my general reading, so sometimes my ideas emerge from there. That was the case with a lot of the genetic science in *Black Man*, some of the underlying economics in *Market Forces*, and the pheromone sub-plot in my *Black Widow* comic. But, as often as not, ideas will pop up out of some completely random piece of personal observation or experience – you sit on a cabin veranda in the Caribbean and watch geckos run about upside down on the ceiling, and suddenly it strikes you: what if there was a technology derived from that for climbers? Or you sign the agreement on a car rental and find yourself wondering what it'd be like to have a similar contract for your body. If you're paying attention, almost anything in life can be potential inspiration for a story.

FT: Let's talk about your own novels a little. You first became known for the Takeshi Kovacs SF series, starting with *Altered Carbon*. They're pacy, punchy reads with, along the way, a lot to say about the consequences of war, ethics and the value of life. Why did you want to write them, and who were you inspired by?

RM: SF was always my first love in terms of reading, and so I think it was inevitable that when I started trying to write, that was where I'd come out. And if there is one writer who signposted the way for me, it has to be William Gibson, whose Sprawl stories were the first thing that really leapt off the page at me and made me realise: *I want to write stuff like this*. Of course, what I'd detected, unknowingly, in Gibson's work was a laconic noir worldliness that he'd borrowed from the American hardboiled tradition, and that suited my increasingly jaundiced view of human affairs. By the time I sat down to write *Altered Carbon*, I'd been back to check out that noir heritage first hand – I was reading everything from early practitioners like Hammett and Chandler, right up to the latest exponents like James Ellroy and Lawrence Block. And at the same time, by then, I'd also had a bellyful of Thatcher and Reagan's world, but was equally exasperated with the way the Left was twisting itself ideologically out of any possible relevance to the lives of the ordinary working people it was supposed to represent. That gave me a political dimension to place alongside the hardboiled one, and noir turned out to be the ideal tool for dovetailing the two. There was a sense of moral bankruptcy in the air, a sense of failed ideals, and Kovacs walked right out of those ruins.

FT: Winning the *Arthur C Clarke Award* in 2008 for *Black Man* (*Thirteen* in the US) must have been a notable event for you, too. How important are such awards to the genre, in your opinion?

RM: Well, it's the highest accolade in British SF – but I think awards like the Clarke are vital, because what they do in a consumer economy is to create a valuable counterpoint to the dynamic of validation through sheer volume of sales, which ultimately is too susceptible to a lowest-common-denominator race to the bottom. Of course, juries are made up of human beings, and so are eminently fallible. But I prefer to trust the opinion of a group of informed enthusiasts in a field rather than the aggregated purchasing reflex of a million marketing-driven consumers. There is a lot to be said for informed opinion.

FT: Have we heard the last of Takeshi Kovacs and his universe?

RM: I haven't at any point drawn a definitive line under the Kovacs series – not least because I'd love to go back there myself! But I'm smart enough to know that if you strip-mine your inspiration without mercy, sooner or later you're going to run up against the law of diminishing returns. Every series character I've ever known and loved hit that wall sooner or later, and I wanted to get out before it happened to me. *Woken Furies* just seemed like a good place to jump ship: third book, some sense of closure in the character arc, and also a sense that I'd pushed the body-swapping conceit about as far as I usefully could. That said, if I ever have a fresh enough idea for either Kovacs or the Protectorate universe, I'll jump back in quite happily.

FT: Most recently, the 'Land Fit for Heroes' series caused quite a stir. Personally, I loved *The Steel Remains*. It reminded me very much of Michael Moorcock's Elric books: intelligent fantasy with an appropriately modern-seeming dystopian background.

RM: I always loved old-school sword-and-sorcery. Moorcock's work is among my favourites, and I think I always had a hankering to write some of my own. I wanted to see how the noirish vision of the Kovacs books might translate into a fantasy landscape. A tale told *after* the Great War against a Great Evil, a tale about post-traumatic stress and disillusion in the wake of victory – a tale, in fact, to cover all the aspects of war that fantasy so habitually avoids. And then, about six years ago, I showed the character vignettes to my UK editor – and I was signed up for three books, just like that!

FT: And where next?

RM: I'm currently at work on the third book in the 'Land Fit for Heroes' trilogy, and I have contracts for several more SF novels. I'm developing a couple of ideas for graphic novel sequences, and both the games I've worked on have the door left open for a next instalment. I have the very great luxury of choosing the work I do, and that is, frankly, a gift from the gods.

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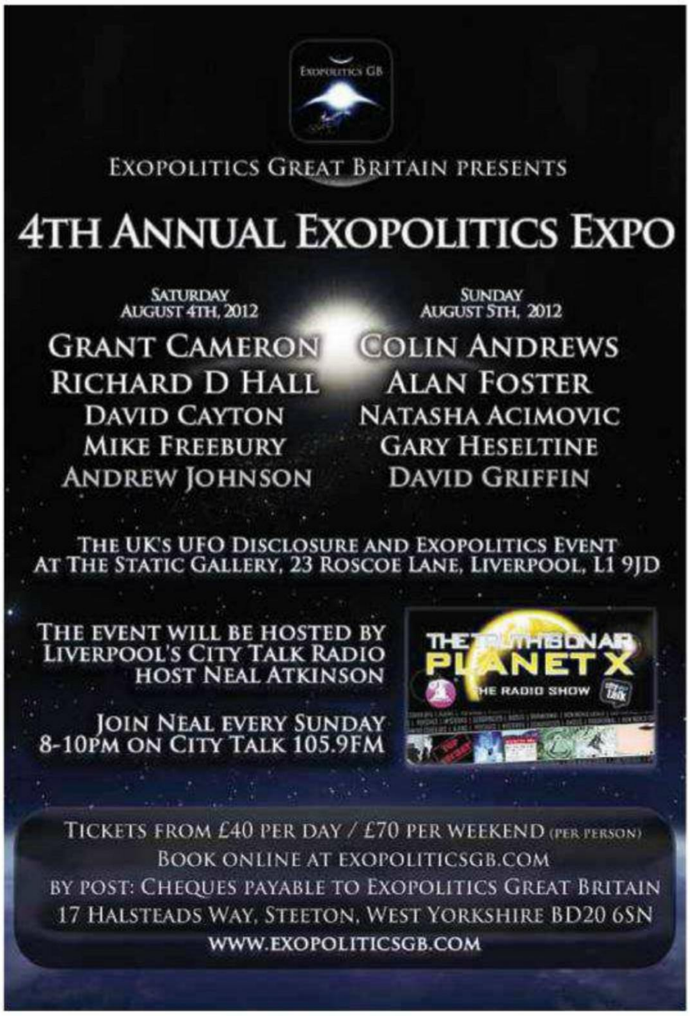
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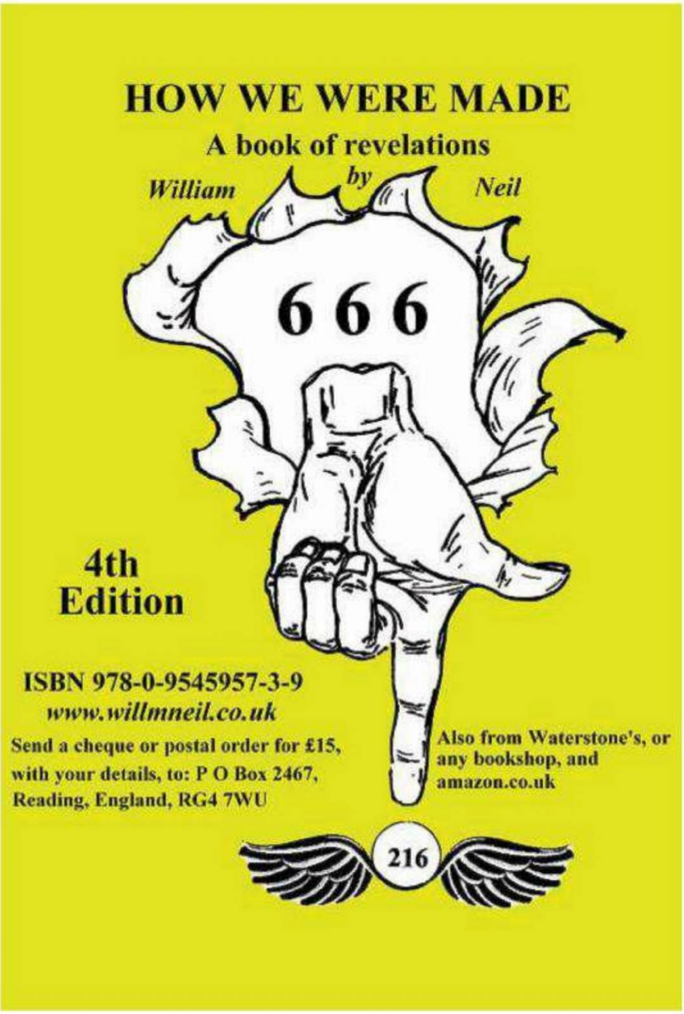
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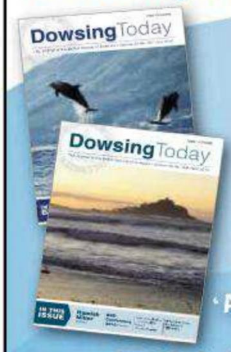

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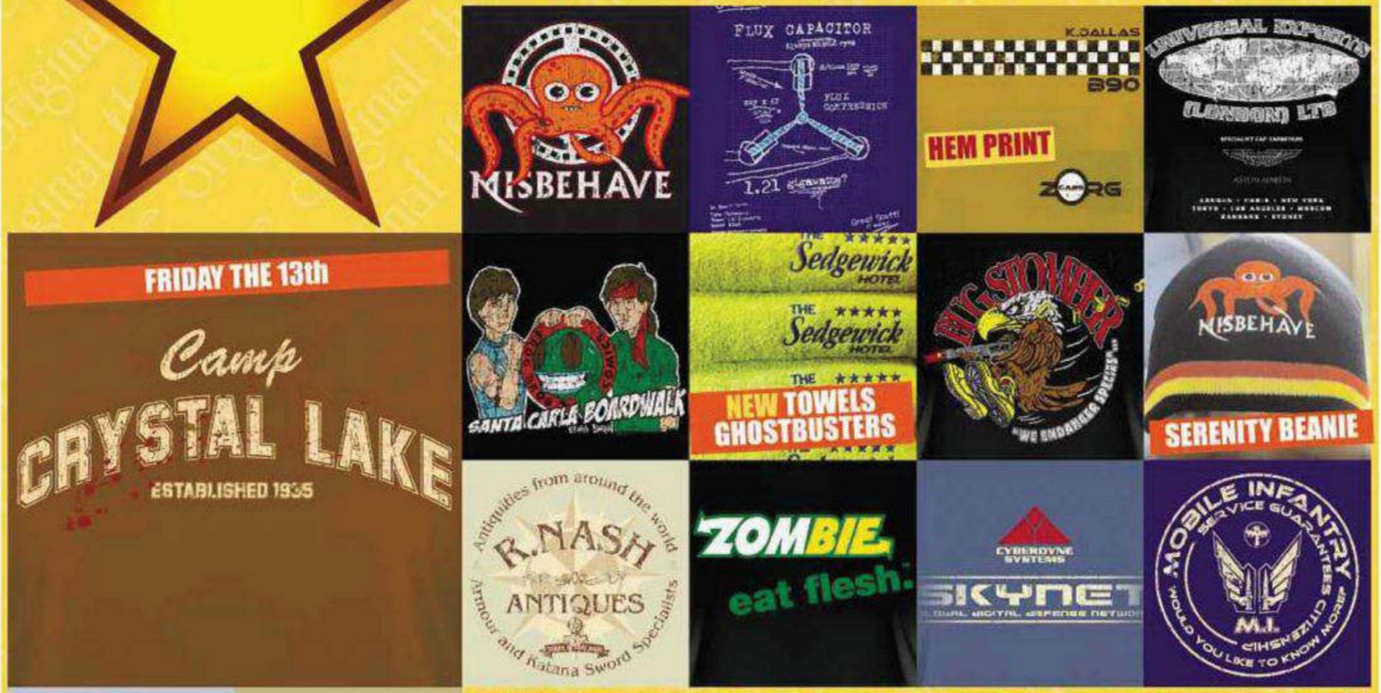
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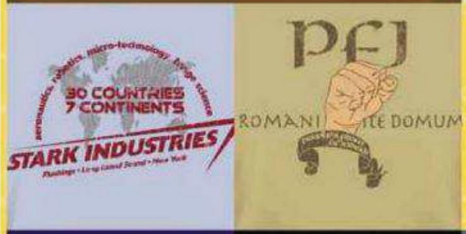
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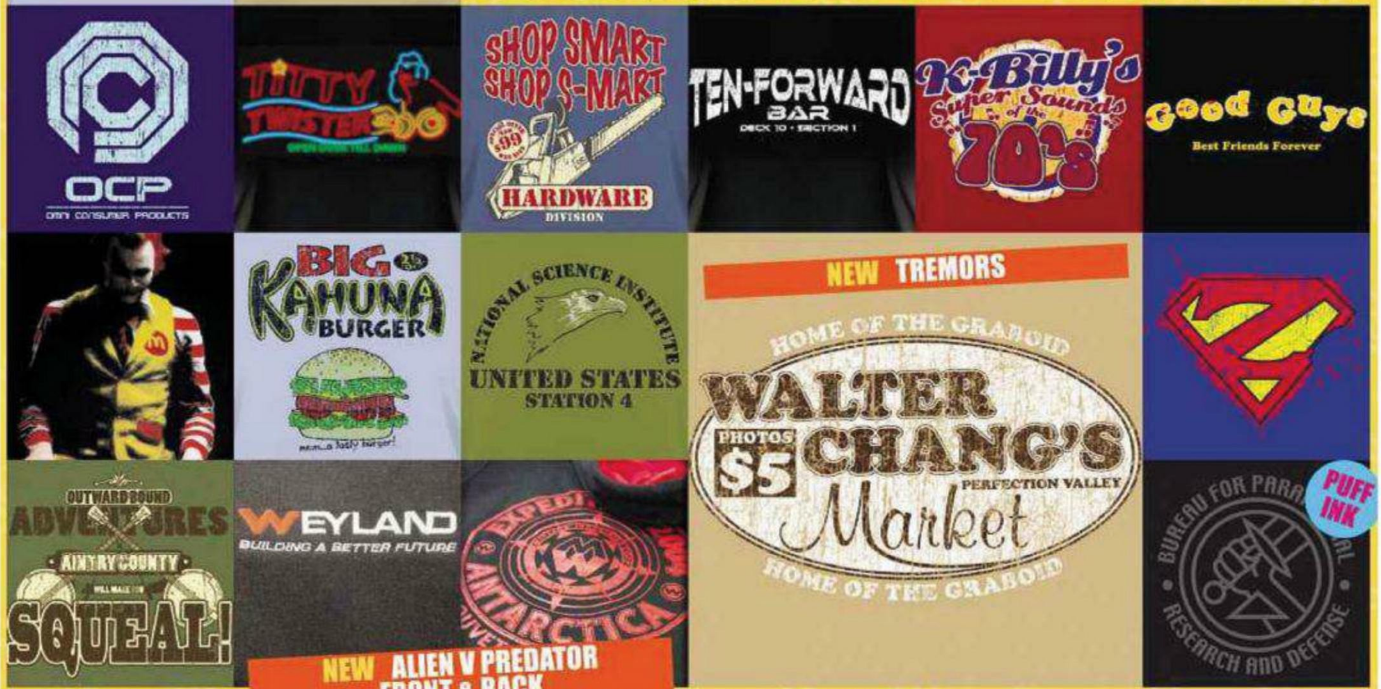
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Dear FT...

letters

Tight fit

Sadly for Hadrian Jeffs's recollection of an undated early 1970s article in *The Field* about the mysterious mission of a Royal Navy Oberon class submarine to Loch Ness via the Caledonian Canal [**FT287:74**], the locks on that canal accommodate vessels of a maximum length of 150ft (46m). Boats of the Oberon class were a shade over 295ft (90m) long. Wherever the sub Mr Jeffs recalls reading about was heading, therefore, it was not Loch Ness.

Mike Dash
London

San Clemente monster

The late Kenneth Norris, a former curator for Marineland of the Pacific (1954–1960) and one of the world's most respected oceanographers, may have solved posthumously the mystery of 'The San Clemente Monster' discussed by Loren Coleman and Patrick Huyghe in their book, *The Field Guide to Lake Monsters, Sea Serpents and other Mystery Denizens of the Deep*.

Sighted so frequently off the Channel Islands of southern California since 1914, this 'waterhorse' captured the attention of big game fishermen. In his book *The Porpoise Watcher*, Norris describes how he and the Marineland collectors would often observe whales 'spyhopping' off the southern California coast while they were fishing for specimens to stock the oceanarium. Spyhopping is a natural behaviour in which a whale takes a vertical position in the water with its head above the water to look at its surroundings. Grey whales are notorious for doing this during their annual migration from the Bering Sea to Mexico. When viewed from a certain angle, the spyhopping whale takes on a different appearance. Often the whale has seaweed or kelp dangling from its mouth, which could give the appearance of a 'mane' so often identified with a waterhorse.

In his book, Norris describes how the superstitious fishermen who worked the waters off southern California would describe the spyhopping pilot whale as 'monaco' – a Sicilian term to describe a priest wearing black robes. This is what a pilot whale looked like to them when spyhopping and viewed from a certain angle.

If this is the secret of 'The San Clemente Monster', then the late Kenneth Norris would be the first of two Marineland curators to solve the mystery of a sea monster. In the early 1960s, Forrest Wood – then curator of Marineland in Florida – identified the 'St Augustine Monster' that washed ashore in Florida in 1896 as the carcass of a giant octopus having a 200ft (60m) armspan when alive.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Meat-free

A few days after reading about the Irish restaurant offering "roast stuffed aborigine" (instead of aubergine) [**FT285:9**], I visited the Balti House restaurant in Hockley, Nottingham, and found they were also offering 'Aborigine'. In this case we knew it wasn't the real thing though, because it was on the vegan menu.

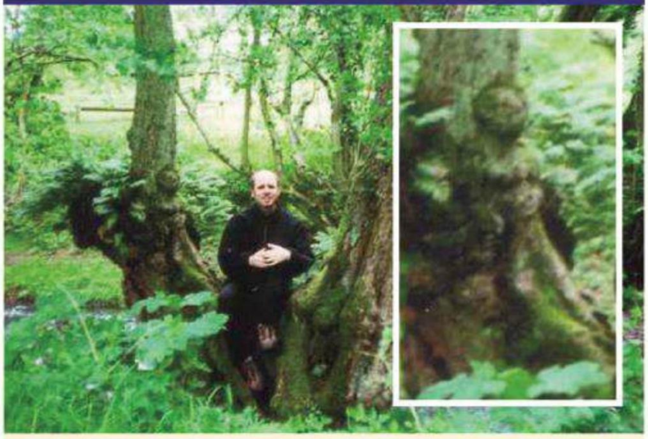
Stephen Baker
By email

Ghostly encounters

In response to various letters in *Fortean Times*, I'd like to say that I used to be scared of the dark, and as a child experienced all sorts of scary things at night, almost certainly due to an overactive imagination. In contrast, the two ghostly encounters which I believe to have been genuine, particularly as one of them was also seen by my husband, both took place in daylight, including one in a very sunny garden. Mass hallucination anybody?

Sue Barden
By email

Simulacra Corner



Sarah Gott took this picture of her husband in a Welsh wood – and only later noticed the strange woodland creature leaning against the tree behind him.

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Submarine protocol

Mythchaser asks about the belief – incidentally recently iterated by Al Murray on his BBC 5Live show, *7 Day Sunday* – that Britain's nuclear submarines must listen to *Today* on BBC Radio 4 each morning, as if it fails to be broadcast it will mean Britain has been obliterated by a nuclear strike [**FT286:19**].

According to a BBC press release from October 2007, the claim first surfaced in 2002 in the book *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* by the respected journalist and historian Professor Peter Hennessy.[1] Hennessy stated that if a set number of days pass without *Today* being broadcast it was to be taken as evidence that the UK had been attacked and that the submarine commanders should open and execute their special sealed orders. Hennessy did not reveal his sources, and others, including Paul Donovan who wrote a book about *Today*, remain sceptical about the claim.

On 28 November 2003, the *Manchester Evening News* carried a story headlined "Radio silence puts subs on nuclear alert" after *Today* was silenced due to a fire at the BBC. It suggested that the contents of the sealed orders offer commanders four options: put their vessels under US command; make their way to Australia; launch a nuclear strike against the enemy; or use their own judgement.[2]

It appears that the veracity of the *Today* myth will remain in doubt unless a relevant party – such as a former nuclear submarine commander or a retired senior Ministry of Defence official – confirms or denies the claim; but as that would involve breaking the Official Secrets Act, it's unlikely to happen.

Martyn P Jackson
Cramlington, Northumberland

Notes

1 http://bbc.in/duU0Dc (BBC).

2 http://bit.ly/bTyD5n (menmedia.co.uk).

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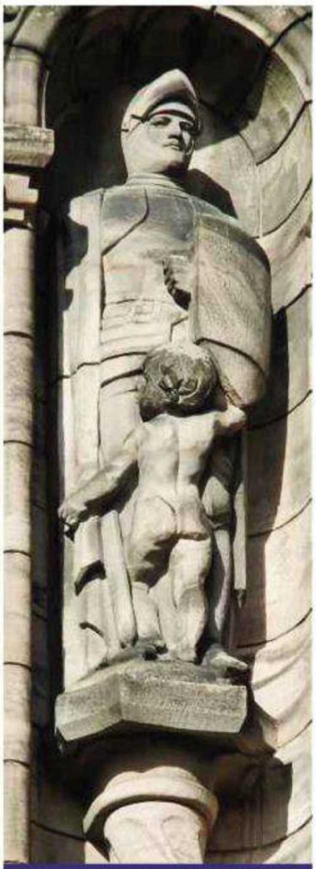
letters

Gill-men

Following your correspondence on the origin of gill-man legends [**FT283:54–55, 285:68, 286:69**], I should like to draw your attention to *The Phantom from 10,000 Leagues* – a deathlessly awful B-movie which foretold *Black Lagoon* etc. The copyright date is 1955, but the monster sequences were filmed in the Forties and 'better' actors called on to resurrect an abysmal first version (I can't find a copy of this, but, I think the early shots were from 1947).

Andrew Healy
Ashford, Middlesex



Odd statue

This statue is on the outside wall of the war memorial in Edinburgh Castle. It is hard to tell what it is supposed to represent, but one interpretation is that it shows a small child pleasuring a knight. Any other suggestions?

Paul & Melanie Jackson
By email

Magic bullets

There is a great irony about Dion Fortune leading the protection of the sacred Isles of Avalon (**FT287:44–48**), as her family were the world's largest producers of arms and armaments. By the mid-19th century, all the steel used in the manufacture of guns for the British government was Firth's steel. The guns that suppressed the Indian Mutiny and those that sank the Chinese fleet in 1857 came from their 25 acres (10ha) of foundries. They cast larger and larger ordnance and, eventually, the heaviest single casting of the time. It became an 81-ton gun with a 16-inch (41cm) diameter barrel.

Affluent Northern Industrialists, the Firths climbed high. Dion Fortune's grandfather acquired the family motto 'Deo, non Fortuna'. One of his sons was Regis Professor of Modern History at Oxford. Another became, among other things, Honorary Canon of Winchester Cathedral (where, many centuries before, a Royal act of talismanic magic to protect the country was performed, when King Alfred buried a golden dragon for the safety of the realm). Another son, Arthur Firth married the daughter of John Smith, and it was the combustion of their chemistry for each other that forged Dion Fortune, the greatest woman magician of the last century. Her magic worked; England was kept safe from invasion during the war. Maybe there are such things as magic bullets?

Geraldine Beskin
Atlantis Bookshop, London

That playwright

Regarding *The Man Who Was Never Shakespeare* [reviewed **FT286:58**]: anyone who attests that Shakespeare was "illiterate" is either ignorant of, or wilfully disregarding, what is known of Shakespeare's life. True, there is no documentary evidence that he attended the Stratford grammar school (the relevant registers have not survived) but as his father – an alderman, 'ale and bread taster', Justice of the Peace and Mayor – was entitled to free education for his sons, it is unlikely that he would not have done so. The most probable reason that Shakespeare did not attend university is that he had married (the already pregnant) Ann Hathaway by the age of 18 (when most young men started their university education). Only unmarried young men were allowed into universities – the clue is in the title of that first degree.

However, the main objections to the idea that there was a 'conspiracy' to pass off the 'true authorship' of the works, both plays and poetry, to "a man without learning, letters, books or experience" is to ask why and how. In an age when royal patronage and preferment were the most highly sought after social accomplishments, why would anyone who had written a series of history plays that flattered the Tudor dynasty and reinforced its tenuous claims to the throne want to hide his light under a bushel? Also, as both monarch and state lived in constant fear of 'Popish plots' and possible counter claims to the throne, any hint of conspiracy was ruthlessly investigated and suppressed. Then we have to consider how would it be possible for Shakespeare's illiteracy and non-authorship of the works to be concealed from his fellow actors, stage hands and partners (in the shared ownership of the company and theatres)? Or in the unlikely event that they were all in on the plot, how is it that none of them, despite several, sometimes acrimonious, splits in the various companies he was in, did not speak out, either during his lifetime or after his death? Again, any idea that such a conspiracy could succeed shows either an ignorance or disregard of the nature and structure of Elizabethan society in general, and the small and enclosed theatrical milieu in particular.

Dean Smith
Chesham, Buckinghamshire

Who rang Rey Rivera?

I found Mikita Brottman's article "Death on the thirteenth floor" [**FT286:54–55**] interesting – but what about the phone call Rey Rivera received before he left home abruptly for the last time? It is mentioned in the narrative but never referred to again. It's quite frustrating when a key piece of evidence is left unexplained.

Graham White
Foston on the Wolds, Humberside

Editor's note: We asked Ms Brottman about this, and she replied: "Rey's houseguest overheard him getting the call. His cellphone was found on the rooftop, still working, and was turned over to the police. The police chief said, 'There was a call received from the Fells Point area of Baltimore just before Rivera left his home,' but wouldn't comment further. It's something the police never revealed."

Paradigm shifts

At risk of sounding like a 'dogmatic scientist', I would like to comment on some of the arguments against science in Steve Marshall's FBI piece on Rupert Sheldrake ['The Science Delusion', **FT286:38–40**]. Let me start with a generalised defence: there is a perfectly valid reason why huge paradigm shifts in science are resisted and that is that the current theories explain the Universe (not all of it, naturally) to a fantastic degree of accuracy, so there is actually very good reason why so much faith (if you will) is put in them. Hence, to create a new paradigm, one has to have some absolutely amazing new result that can't be explained by any of the current theory. This is generally what happens, the most obvious case being the advent of quantum mechanics. In fact, this example really leaves a dent in the idea that science will always try to uphold the orthodoxy when challenged. I am not saying that there wasn't resistance to the idea of quantum mechanics (Einstein and 'God does not play dice' for instance), but in the end the weight of observations won through.

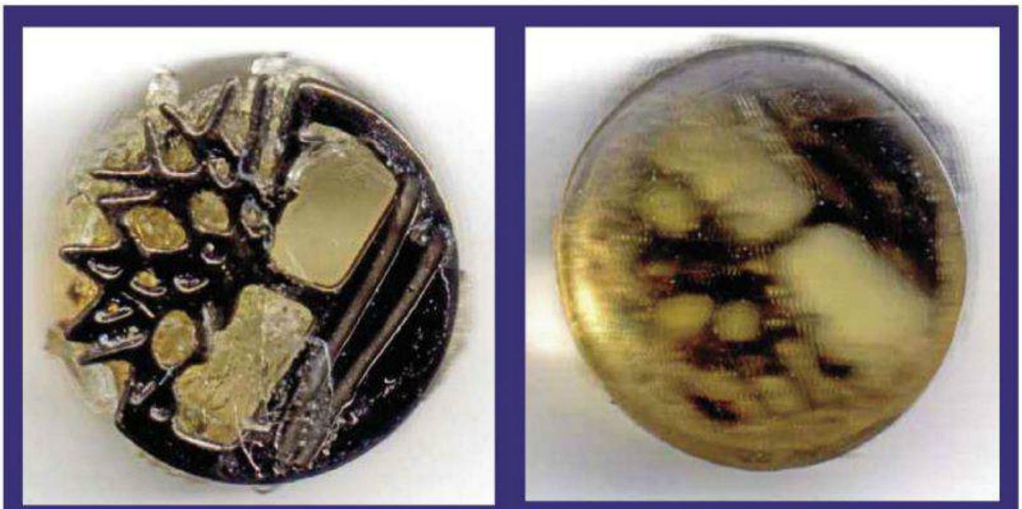
I'd also like to clarify a few of the points in the FBI report that were left ambiguous. To proclaim that the Big Bang Theory is just a theory as a reason why it is wrong is on a par with the same argument about evolution. As it happens, there is nobody who claims to understand what actually happened at the moment of the big bang with total certainty. However, there are experimental data that support the idea of a big bang – for example, Hubble's discovery of the Universe's expansion and the fine structure of the cosmic microwave background. To suggest that it is simply 'believed' without justification is very misleading. It's absurd to suggest that because the speed of light is used to define the metre this means we would be unaware if that speed varied. For example, the strength of the electromagnetic force is in part determined by the speed of light, and thus a change in that speed would amongst other things change the position of all the emission lines in atomic spectra. I also wouldn't be surprised (although I have not actually checked this) that the changing of the definition of the speed of light coincided with the advent of new, more accurate ways of measuring it. Also, coincidently, the latest report about the faster-than-light neutrino experiment [**FT282:14**] is that there was some faulty cable which gave a spurious result.

If you asked 100 scientists if they thought that everything in the Universe was understood, they would all say no. They would probably also have different thoughts on what would be the next major change in science. This is why I really don't understand the premise that there is a grand resistance to change – everybody expects that there will be something. However, I am sure that everyone would agree that whatever this next major change is, there will have to be a great deal of evidence to back it up – I honestly don't see how it could not be so.

Steven Daly
By email

I was interested to read Steve Marshall's FBI piece on Rupert Sheldrake, but as a scientific materialist (albeit tempered with a certain level of fortean bemusement), I was concerned about the gratuitous and unsupported attacks on materialists and atheists Marshall makes throughout the piece, as well as many of his other assumptions. For example, the claim that a machine can't have a 'goal of its own' places a completely arbitrary limitation on a machine's potential complexity. Marshall seems to tolerate the notion that dogs are complex machines as at least conscionable, but balks at the suggestion that 'even people' could be considered such, casually assuming a completely artificial distinction between *Homo sapiens* and other species. Sheldrake's questioning of the immutability of scientific 'truths' may well be interesting in the detail of the book (which I haven't read), but anyone with even a cursory knowledge of the philosophy of science over the past century or so will be aware that this isn't news.

James Machin
London



Tiny mystery

I found this strange little object about 18 months ago. It was stuck to the back of my hand and, thinking it was a bogey, I was about to flick it off. It is 4.5mm in diameter and was covered with a sticky gel-like coating (hence my initial reaction). It was too small to photograph, so I scanned it at high resolution (20Mb). I have kept it in an airtight glass jar ever since, during which time the 'gel' coating has completely disappeared leaving what looks like a hard, clear, lens-like button bonded to the extremely thin 'metallic' component seen in the scan. Over time this component has lost its 'bronze' sheen and is now a dull brown colour. I'm sure there is a perfectly simple explanation – isn't there? I would be grateful if someone could put me out of my misery!

Gerald Sleeman. *by email*

Height variation

Regarding "Our Titchy Ancestors" (Mythconceptions 150, **FT284:21**): it's fairly well established that diet is the key to average population height. Obviously, in the West we only have some written records for heights going back around two millennia, with archæology now filling in the gaps. All the evidence is that we are just not so very different in height from people in Pompeii and Herculaneum. For consistency we have to exclude slaves, as they were either from conquered territories outside of Italy, or born into slavery and historically underfed. So using the free Italian population (from whom the legions recruited) as the base, studies collated by Jonathan Philip Roth have shown that the average male height in the Roman Imperial period was 5ft 7in (170cm), which was the average UK height in the 1960s. In fact, that is at best only an inch or two below the current UK average, although undoubtedly in those under the age of 30 the average height may be greater.

Recent excavations have shown that the population of Pompeii and Herculaneum was eating a better balanced diet in the working class areas (where legions recruited) than many in the UK's council estates do now. The evidence indicated that if you exclude the absolutely destitute and slaves (who had no support networks), then both the rich and poor in Pompeii had a good diet. The rich may have had greater quantities, but the poor also ate decently. They discovered this by examining the contents of a cesspit below a block of modest flats in Herculaneum (see "Crap science", **FT282:19**).

If we head back to the time of the Norman conquest, evidence suggests that the average soldier on both sides was taller than many British soldiers in the Boer War, where the minimum height for recruitment had to be reduced to 5ft 4in (162.5cm). During the industrial revolution and urbanisation, average population heights in the UK shrank: in 1860 the average height for a British soldier was 5ft 8in (172.5cm), but by the start of the Zulu War in 1879 it had dropped to 5ft 4in (162.5cm) and by 1899 it was nearer 5ft (152.5cm). In fact, the British raised a regiment in 1914 nicknamed the 'Cheshire Bantams', whose average height was just 5ft.

The changes in average height are most likely entirely attributable to diet and protein intakes. Another example: the Japanese were 5in (12.7cm) smaller than the Americans on average in 1945, but now they are less than 2in (5.08cm) smaller because they have a higher calorie intake. There appears to be evidence that South Korean males are 4in (10.2cm) taller on average than their North Korean counterparts because of the dietary differences in the last 50 years.

Andy Kelly
Fylde Coast

it happened to me...

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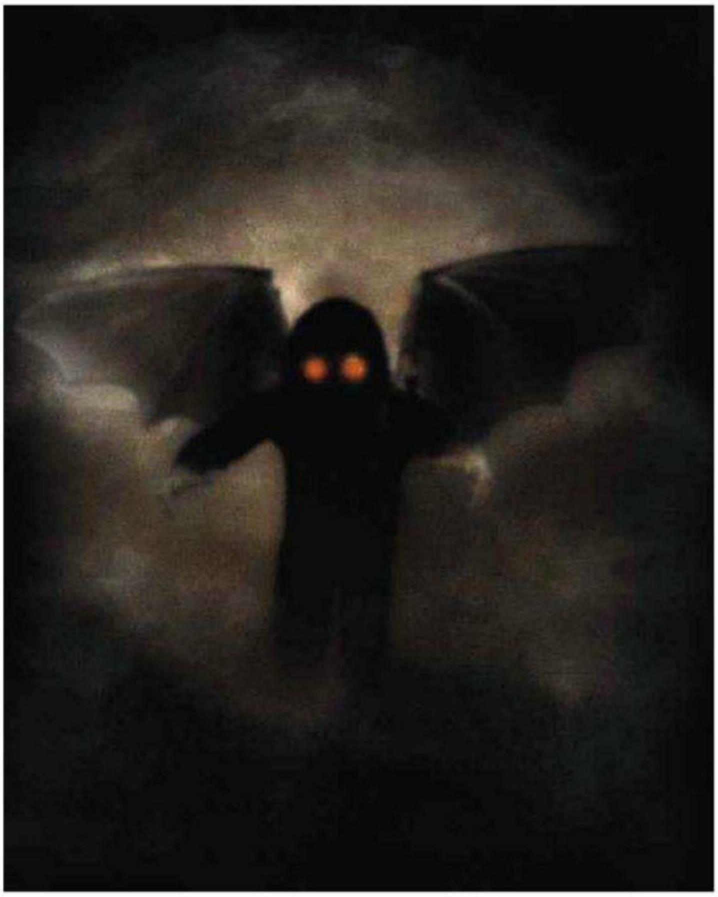
Mothman encounter

The following happened almost 26 years ago. I was around 10 years old, living with my parents in a cul-de-sac in the west end of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the northeast of England. It was summer, probably around July or August, as the nights were hot and it stayed light until around 10pm. My dad had helped me build a 'den' in the little field at the entrance to the cul-de-sac and this is where I was playing that night with my friend David. My mum was at work in a bingo hall and my dad was at the pub. David lived across the street and his mum was watching me until mine returned home from work. Just after 10pm, I needed a pee. I didn't want to go to David's loo in case his mum told us to stay in, as it was getting dark, so I went into an archway that separated my house from our next-door neighbour's. These archways were used as access to the back gardens as the houses were terraced.



ETIENNE GILFILLAN

I looked around hysterical with fear and saw the thing open a great pair of wings and take off over the houses...

While I was relieving myself, I heard footsteps at the end of the archway closer to the back gardens. I immediately went quiet, trying to hurry up as I thought it was our neighbour, who, I thought, wouldn't be best pleased to catch me peeing against the side of his house. Suddenly a dark shape blocked the whole archway entrance. It stood on two legs like a man, but was huge: the arches were at least 9ft (2.7m) high and the top of its head almost reached the top. I was terrified. There was no sound. It didn't speak – it just stood there for what seemed like ages although it was probably only a few seconds. I could make out no facial features and couldn't tell where its shoulders ended and its head began – it seemed to have no neck. Its 'eyes' were huge and appeared to reflect the ambient light, just like a cat's eyes would when caught in a car's headlights. I don't know when I started but I realised I was sobbing. It didn't move and neither did I. I was rooted to the spot, maybe with fear. Then it came towards me, almost running. I screamed and ducked, shielding my head with my arms. I felt a warm knock on my arm but was too afraid to look, then, once I knew it was past me, I stood up and ran *in the same direction* as the creature. Don't ask me why, but when I got out of the archway I looked around almost hysterical with fear and saw the thing open a great pair of wings and take off over the houses.

I must have stood there watching the spot where it flew over the rooftops for a long time, as David came to see where I was. I remember screaming about monsters and saying I needed to see his mum to call mine. David took me back to his house. When his mum saw me the look on her face showed she knew something really bad had happened. She called my mum and, as we were waiting for her to come and get me, David's mum saw I was bleeding from my arm. She took me to get cleaned up and there was a slight cut on my upper arm, although it was not a clean cut – more jagged, as if whatever had done it was not very sharp. I still bear a faint scar to this day. When my mum came home, I told her what had happened and even though she listened I knew she thought what I had seen was just a bird or even a bat, but I know it was no bird or anything else I've seen before or since.

Michael Riddell
By email

Aeroplane mystery

Recently, my wife Valerie and I noticed a high-flying aeroplane with its usual vapour trail following behind. However, there was also an unusual phenomenon emanating forwards from the front of the plane. It looked to me like a beam of "grey light" being shone ahead by the plane, while Valerie saw it as a kind of grey "tractor beam", as though it were pulling the plane along. The beam, about the same width as the vapour trail, was dead straight, like a beam of light; visibility was very clear against a background of blue sky. We watched the plane for about a minute or two until it disappeared into the distance. Despite the many high-flying aircraft we have observed over the decades, neither of us has ever seen anything like this. Can anyone throw any light (pun intended!) on what could have caused this strange phenomenon?

Eric Fitch
Hereford

Impossible jump

I am a professional airline pilot, aged 49, and of sound mind.

I was standing on the old Iron Age fort of Old Sarum castle in Wiltshire late in 2011, looking roughly east-north-east at the Old Sarum airfield and Castle Road. As I watched the airfield for activity (there was nothing at all moving), I drifted my gaze along Castle Road, where I saw a person in a red jumpsuit, such as a parachutist might wear, drop from the sky into the street, compose himself and walk off towards Salisbury. I had to clear my eyes! There was neither parachute nor the commotion that would have accompanied a parachutist landing in the street. I searched the sky but saw no aeroplane.

I immediately texted my brother to share this event, but he just electronically shrugged his shoulders – he's had his share of such events, including time slips.

I know people do not just drop out of the sky into streets, but after a lifetime of being air-minded, I like to think I know what something falling from above looks like! I therefore cannot explain what I "know" I "saw".

David Perry
Stratford sub Castle, Wiltshire

Pumpkin head

I recall a nocturnal trip in 1998 from Los Angeles to Laughlin, Nevada, to attend the International UFO Congress with my then-boyfriend Adam.

I was 21. We were nearing the city when we came upon a large hill that drivers have to navigate around to reach Laughlin's main drag. From the top, we could see the hotels and garish lights of the city. As we descended around the bend, I (as the passenger) noticed a pair of flailing arms down a ways on the right side of the road. Perhaps a driver had rolled his car off the mountain? As we approached, we noticed something odd.

The figure flailed madly, and didn't seem intent on flagging down any motorists. Instead, it stood in place, like one of those stupid car wash parachute men – which, I've come to learn, are called air dancers. As we came closer, I noticed not a face but the shape of its head. It was like an outsized pumpkin, and its arms were very spindly and far too long. It was around midnight, and we were driving too fast for me to make out facial features, but as we came within about 15ft (4.5m), the figure suddenly lunged at my car door, scratching at it as if it wanted to open it and eat me or something.

It happened too fast to notice much, although there was no sign of a vehicle, overturned or otherwise. It didn't speak, or make a noise of any kind.

Shaken, we took comfort in the city fast approaching. I was looking forward to this, my first UFO Congress. Perhaps, I said, we were hallucinating from sleep deprivation as we made our way out of the brand-new, just leased, Saab and around to the trunk to retrieve our suitcases. Perhaps we had been hallucinating, but for one detail. The rear-view mirror looked as though it had been knocked nearly off, and there were a number of large, vicious scratches on the outside of my car door.

Skylaire Alfvegren
Los Angeles, California

My spook

As I explained in 2004 ["It happened to me", **FT191:77**], I have been bugged by a personal spook for many years. Mostly crashes and bangs in the night; as a bit of variation, ornaments shifted around the bedroom, sometimes a little squeal like a baby or a cat when I put my foot on the floor, and the 'personal' visits I described.

Once my wife lost a silver pendant off a necklace. Many times we searched the floor where she thought she had dropped it. Then, one Sunday morning about a month later, she had the church service on the bedroom radio and was singing along with the hymns and suddenly shouted, for no reason, "Please let me have my pendant back!", looked down and there it was – right at her feet on a patch of floor we had searched so many times.

On 3 January 2010, we were in a horrendous car smash when our Toyota Auris automatic went bandit on me and accelerated out of control. We smashed into the back of a large van and both vehicles were a write-off. It was no way to treat a pair of little old octogenarians! The roof was cut off and we were scraped out. My wife was helicoptered to hospital, and what was left of me was later poured into an ambulance. I collected a broken collarbone and seriously painful bruises, mostly to my ribs and shoulders. I had three days in hospital, but my wife was kept in for three weeks.

While I was alone in the house, sitting by the fireplace physically and emotionally shattered, there was a familiar squeal/squawk from the fire itself. I gave in completely, wailed, "Look, Spook, give it up. I just can't take any more, I've had enough." So then I got peace for quite a long time. Maybe my old Spook has a heart, after all.

It started again a few months ago. Sticks cracking in the corner of the bedroom, crashes beside my head, bangs from the bathroom, all in the middle of the night. But I'd had it. Fifteen years of this ethereal nutcase was enough. At best, it was a nasty little nuisance that had ruined my sleep too many times, at worst a really sinister entity that had proved it could inflict disfiguring injuries on me if and when it wanted to, as described in my earlier letter. Then I remembered the carving of Jesus I brought back from Bethlehem about 30 years ago. Olive wood, they said. This one has Jesus painfully attached to a tree. I installed it on the drawers beside my bed, and now say a little prayer every night before I get into bed, and one in the morning: "Thank you Lord for a nice, quiet night."

So far it works. The atmosphere seems lighter and the air cleaner. Occasionally, a half-hearted bang from the bathroom and recently a couple of funny noises in the bedroom. These I can live with – or should I say, sleep with! It is perhaps early days, about six weeks since I began, but six weeks of blessed relief. Now time will tell!

If you care to use any of this for publication, it may help some poor soul who has a similar problem. I would like to say that I believe your magazine performs a real service in this respect. Anyone afflicted by a weird and very frightening experience will surely find it easier to take if they have read or heard about it happening to someone else.

Doug Hall
Knaresborough, North Yorkshire

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Uncanny iPod

Is it just me, or do iPods somehow have a link to the Other Side? There have been times in my life when coincidence has appeared in musical form, but my iPod occasionally displays an uncanny knack when it comes to picking songs. I tend to leave mine on Shuffle, and since there are over 1,600 tracks, it has an extensive range from which to choose. I'm prone to bursting into song; there are times when I find myself singing a more unusual choice, and when listening to music later, the same song comes on. Statistically, I suppose, this is not that unlikely. However, one evening during the week following Whitney Houston's death, the iPod played two of her songs within three random selections. And this evening [1 March 2012], the day after Davy Jones's death, I turned my iPod on prior to starting the washing up, and lo and behold, the first thing I heard was the talkie bit prior to the introduction of "Cheer up Sleepy Jean". Even my husband, who was also in the room, thought this was a bit odd.

So, what's the answer? Am I psychically linked to the machine, or does it share a link with the television whose speakers it shares in the kitchen? Or does this all boil down to statistics?

Dr Nicola Senior
Exeter, Devon

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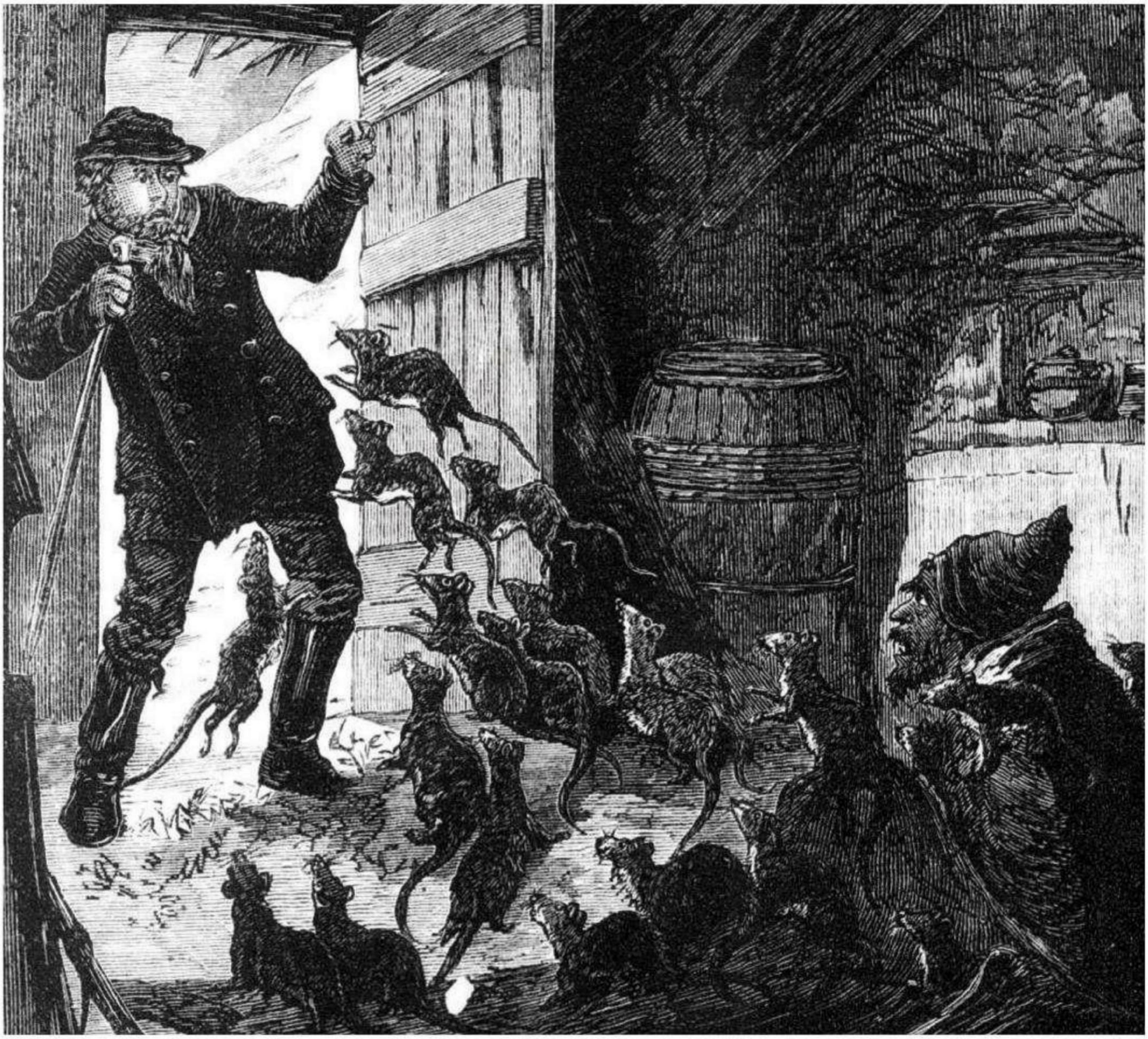

ABOVE: Joseph Mason is defended by his army of rats, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 11 January 1879. The story originated in the local Welsh papers, and is probably true.

12. A WELSH HERMIT DEFENDED BY RATS

In January 1879, an old man named Joseph Mason was prosecuted for failing to support his wife and leaving her chargeable to the Aberystwyth union workhouse. It turned out that he had deserted her and become a hermit up in the mountains, miles above the lead mines of Goginan. After the workhouse had appealed to the Llanbadarn Fawr petty sessions, an officer named Jones was sent out to track down the 70-year-old Mason, described as a former shoemaker.

At Goginan, local men directed Jones toward Mason's humble abode, far up beyond the old mines and the village. After a good deal of searching, Jones finally found the hermitage, which was in the most miserable condition. Although the locals had warned him not to approach the angry, unpredictable hermit, Jones bravely opened the door. Looking around the gloomy, unlit interior, he could see a heap of turf on the floor of this wretched dwelling and some rags that served Mason as a bed. In a corner, he could only just make out the sinister-looking, hunched old hermit glaring at him.

But there was something else, a number of large rats scurrying about; nay, an army of them! Jones stamped his foot to scare the rodents away, but instead they attacked him with the greatest audacity, leaping up and biting at his trousers. Having received the shock of his life from the furious rodents, Jones was put to headlong flight. According to the Welsh mountain men, the old hermit had "tamed and trained his strange companions during his sojourn in the mountains, and encouraged them into his house".

Since Joseph Mason was on the verge of starvation himself, the charge against him was dismissed. It does not seem to have occurred to any person that perhaps he was in need of some help himself, sitting alone in his wretched hermitage above Goginan, with only his rats for company.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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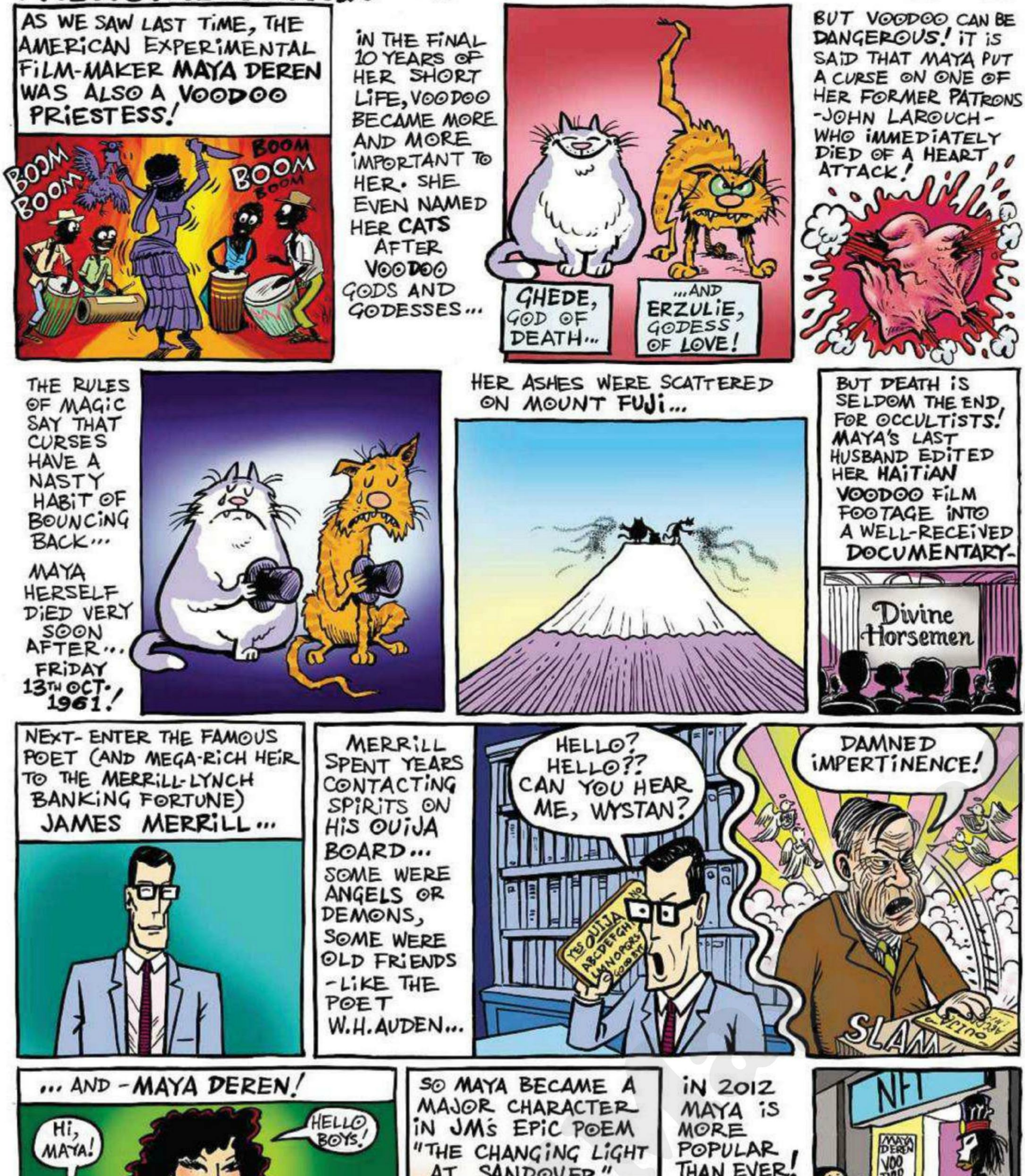
PHENOMENOMIX *MAYA DEREN 2* HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON


AS WE SAW LAST TIME, THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENTAL FILM-MAKER MAYA DEREN WAS ALSO A VOODOO PRIESTESS!
BOOM BOOM
BOOM BOOM BOOM
IN THE FINAL 10 YEARS OF HER SHORT LIFE, VOODOO BECAME MORE AND MORE IMPORTANT TO HER. SHE EVEN NAMED HER CATS AFTER VOODOO GODS AND GODESSES...
GHEDE, GOD OF DEATH...
...AND ERZULIE, GODESS OF LOVE!
BUT VOODOO CAN BE DANGEROUS! IT IS SAID THAT MAYA PUT A CURSE ON ONE OF HER FORMER PATRONS -JOHN LAROUCH- WHO IMMEDIATELY DIED OF A HEART ATTACK!
THE RULES OF MAGIC SAY THAT CURSES HAVE A NASTY HABIT OF BOUNCING BACK...
MAYA HERSELF DIED VERY SOON AFTER... FRIDAY 13TH OCT. 1961!
HER ASHES WERE SCATTERED ON MOUNT FUJI...
BUT DEATH IS SELDOM THE END FOR OCCULTISTS! MAYA'S LAST HUSBAND EDITED HER HAITIAN VOODOO FILM FOOTAGE INTO A WELL-RECEIVED DOCUMENTARY-
Divine Horsemen
NEXT- ENTER THE FAMOUS POET (AND MEGA-RICH HEIR TO THE MERRILL-LYNCH BANKING FORTUNE) JAMES MERRILL...
MERRILL SPENT YEARS CONTACTING SPIRITS ON HIS OUIJA BOARD... SOME WERE ANGELS OR DEMONS, SOME WERE OLD FRIENDS -LIKE THE POET W.H. AUDEN...
HELLO? HELLO?? CAN YOU HEAR ME, WYSTAN?
YES OUIJA NO
DAMNED IMPERTINENCE!
SLAM
... AND -MAYA DEREN!
HI, MAYA!
HELLO BOYS!
SO MAYA BECAME A MAJOR CHARACTER IN JM'S EPIC POEM "THE CHANGING LIGHT AT SANDOVER"...
The Changing Light at Sandover James Merrill
IN 2012 MAYA IS MORE POPULAR THAN EVER! HER FILMS ARE ON DVD, AND THE NATIONAL FILM THEATRE IN LONDON RECENTLY SHOWED A COMPLETE RETROSPECTIVE SEASON! HOORAY FOR MAYA!
NFT
MAYA DEREN VOODOO

COMING NEXT MONTH

NICHOLE SHAFER

NIGHTWALKER

ON THE TRAIL OF SOUTH AFRICA'S MYSTERIOUS SHAPE-SHIFTER

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

FINAL FLIGHT

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO AMELIA EARHART?

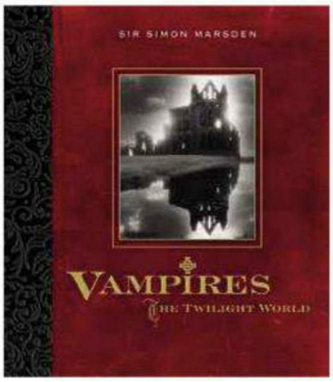
+

CAMBODIAN SPIRITS, OCCULTIST RABBIS, STOMACH SNAKES AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 289

ON SALE 24 MAY

Competition



Sir Simon Marsden's *Vampires: The Twilight World* includes 130 unique photographs that accompany a narrative that defines the legend of the creature that has terrified and seduced the human imagination since before Roman times.

Using infra-red film to convey the ethereal atmosphere of his subjects, Marsden travelled from Germany to the United States, Slovakia to Scotland, hunting out the vampires of myth and literature, and the real individuals suspected of vampirism. The result is a richly illustrated text full of rare discoveries and travellers' tales.

His images include sites of perennial fascination, such as Vlad Dracula's ruined palace in the wilderness of Romania, and more recent places of Vampire pilgrimage, like the Etruscan city of Volterra in Italy, home to *Twilight*'s ancient Vampire coven.

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WHO WROTE THE 1819 SHORT STORY "THE VAMPIRE'?

A LORD BYRON B PERCY SHELLEY C JOHN POLIDORI

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